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S E R M O N S

BY THE LATE

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S. F. of TRIN. COL. DUBLIN.

Andrews Professor of Astronomy,

A N D

M. R. I. A.

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C O N T E N T S.

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S E R M O N I.



LUKE II. 30, 31 and part of 32 Verses.

*Mine Eyes have seen thy Salvation which thou
hast prepar'd before the Face of all People a
Light to lighten the Gentiles.*

OF the many, and important Advan-
tages, of the Christian Revelation,
this seems to be not the least considerable,
that Men are thereby more clearly inform'd,
in the several Particulars of their Duty; and
better enabled for the Performance of it,
than they were by the unassisted Force, of
natural Knowledge.

The Christian Religion therefore, imports
this Supposition; that these Things were
neither generally enough, nor clearly
enough, known before, it pretends to have

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brought

brought Men from Ignorance of those material Points, to Knowledge. To have added this new Instruction to any that we had before from Natural Reason, and to have no otherwise diminish'd the Light of Nature, than by furrounding it with one still more extensive and clear. But to say that it has render'd unnecessary the Use of our Reason, that a Religion which appeals to that, and to our Senses, to be judg'd by them, should afterwards set aside those Judges, by which it has been introduced to our Favour and Approbation, to say that we are to receive, and believe Things directly Contradictory to both; nay that we are to believe Things impossible, and (as some have said) to believe them because they are so: All this tends not so much to the raising of prejudices against Reason, as against the Christian Revelation itself, that does in this Instance, no wise deserve them. Reason is the universal Director, that God has given to the World; and to those who
have

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have any Share of it, no Arguments are sufficient to prove, that it shou'd not be follow'd, so far as it goes. The Christian Religion therefore, in Truth pretends to no more than this, to have brought Knowledge into the World, concerning some Points that were most important to be known; and to have render'd that Knowledge most useful to us, by shewing, how it may be employ'd to the obtaining of Happiness and Immortality, in a World to come.

If this therefore be true; if the Heathen World, was in Ignorance of those Things, and if Christianity has made them known, if Mankind would probably have still remain'd unassur'd about them, (supposing that the Christian Religion had not introduced them) and if Christ when he came, did not only declare, but prove them, by Arguments strong and convincing, then without Doubt, is the Light of Christianity most useful, and valuable to the World, should be receiv'd

with Joy and Thankfulness; and attended to, and follow'd with Care.

My Business therefore shall be to enquire First, whether it appears that the Gentiles, or Nations of the Heathen World, are rightly suppos'd to have wanted any other Knowledge, than what their natural reason afforded them. And secondly, whether Jesus Christ has supplied them with that Knowledge; whether he has really enlightened them, in those Points suppos'd requisite to be known.

The first thing to be enquir'd into is this: Does the Christian Revelation, rightly suppose, that knowledge, was wanting to the Heathen World, more than their natural Reason could supply them with?

In Answer to this Question, it is certain in the first Place, that if there be no God above us, no Man did ever want any Instruction about other Affairs, than the present Concerns

Concerns of Life. If Men were assur'd of this Point, then indeed they might be enabled with Confidence to pronounce, that any Instruction relating to any thing else, than the Business of this World, would be very unnecessary and absurd. But so far are we from being certain, that there is no God, that there start up before us, innumerable Arguments to persuade us, that there must be, that there actually is, an invifible Creator of the Universe! Arguments! which the Subtilty of the boldest Men, never have, nor ever will be able to overturn. If these Arguments shou'd be allow'd only probable; even then, it were to be wish'd, that this Probability were made more clear, that Doubt and Obscurity were remov'd, and that Mankind were made certain, of the Being, of this great Author, of themselves and the Universe. If these Arguments are convincing, (as they most assuredly are) then also it is no less sure, than to those who knew but little, to the World in general, who

who had but an imperfect Knowledge of the Attributes and Perfections of this great Being; it was highly expedient, they should have more, and any clear light, they could receive relating to him, was highly to be desired and sought. But further, tho' there be a God, to whom the World and we owe our being; yet if perhaps, he has design'd us but for a short Existence in this World only, to be busied and amus'd for a few Years here, and then to return to that original nothing, from whence we came; in this Case also, we shall have no need, of any Information about other Affairs, than the mere Concerns, of this present Life; with this Exception, that as we are apt to suspect with ourselves, that somewhat possibly may be hereafter, so it would not be disagreeable to be made certain, (at least to many it would not) that we had nothing on this Subject; there, to give us any concern, but besides that we are thus liable, to this Apprehension, so there are many reasons on
this

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this Subject, that rise up powerfully in the Minds of Men, which cannot be silenc'd, nor beaten down: Reasons, that persuade us, this World, cannot be the only Scene, in which we are concern'd, that that Spirit within us, which contains the Principle of Thought, and Motion, must be something more than inactive Matter ; and if so, that there is a great likelihood and probability, for being of its own nature, immortal; it is also natural to suppose, that the apparent unequal Appointment of Things here, shall be better adjusted in some other Place, the Misfortunes of the Innocent, and Virtuous recompenc'd to them, and the successful Mischiefs of the Iniquitous call'd to Account, and requited with just Punishment.

These Things that I have thus suggested, from many Considerations become probable, and carry with them the likelihood of Truth; if there be any Thing more in them, they are Points of Importance, they are of Importance

tance to all Men, they are what the Minds of all thinking Men, have strain'd after, and strove to be satisfied about. If there be any Thing more than Likelihood in them, the Person who can make, or has already made, any clear Discovery, suited to the general Understanding, and level of Mankind; is doubtless, a Discoverer of useful and valuable Light, to the World. But supposing, that we have no doubt of the Being of a God, or the Probability, of a future State, are we all of us therefore, immediately acquainted, with all, that it would be useful for us to know? Do we know clearly, the Relation in which we stand towards God? Do we naturally know, clearly and distinctly, the Particulars of our Duty to him, to ourselves, and to each other? I do not ask what we know as Christians, or what some may be able now to prove, who have seen the Conclusions, fix'd by the Doctrine of Christ, and have afterwards, fought out Proofs for the moral

Part

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Part of them, that is not a fair Mode of Argument: But did all Men, always, and naturally enjoy that Knowledge; were the Heathen World of old, or are they at present, acquainted with any reasonable Service, to pay to the one supreme God, of the Universe? did the lower Classes of Men, amongst them, know this? had they any satisfactory Reasons to rely upon, that that God, (whom if they knew at all they must know to be holy, pure, and just) would be inclin'd, to forgive the Frailties of our Nature, as often as our extreme Feebleness, and repeated Follies, may require? what sure Proof, could they have to content them, that their Repentence, and Resolutions of Amendment, tho' many Times repeated, and always ineffectual; yet would at Length, certainly reconcile them, to their offended Creator?

They might well wonder at their Condition; with some Sense of every Virtue;

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and

and yet, under the Influence of Passions, hurrying them to every Vice; ignorant, where to apply for Assistance, which they could not but be sensible they daily wanted, for they had no Knowledge of supernatural Assistance, or of the Aids, and secret Communication, of the Spirit of God under these Circumstances, considering how little it is, that human Merit can attain to, how very little every ingenious Mind, will be satisfied with its own Performances; what hopes could even the best amongst them entertain, of arriving at Happiness, and the Presence of God hereafter. Amongst many Defects therefore, under which the Heathens labour'd, these appear to be remarkable. First, that Morality was nowhere fully and clearly taught amongst them; was nowhere so taught, as to have any Influence on the great Bulk of Mankind. It may perhaps be question'd, whether any one of the ancient Philosophers; had a clear View, of all the Particulars of

our



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our moral Duty, and at the same Time, deduc'd them fairly, from the Principles on which they ought to stand, this may the more reasonably be question'd, since there is yet, scarce any one System of Morality produc'd into the World, which has not had Exceptions made to it. But if we shou'd allow that there were one, or two, tolerable Systems of Morality, drawn up by Philosophers of clear Heads and thorough Insight into Nature; yet of what use were these to the far greatest Part? to the middle and to the lower Ranks of Men: Of what use are they to the Ignorant, who most wanted Instruction? To the young and thoughtless who most wanted Admonition, and Restraint? What Authority was stamp'd upon them, to give them Weight, and enforce Attention, from those who had not Leisure or Ability, or whose Youth, and Passions, would not give them Time for the Enquiry? The Pleasures of Sense, are of a lively Character, engaging, and violent; how

often do they prevail, against the firmest Resolutions, founded on the clearest Views of our Duty, and of the Dangers following its Violation.

Can we then expect that the doubtful, and dry Deductions of Philosophy, should be of sufficient Force, to subdue, what we daily, and hourly see, the clear Light, and cherishing Hopes of Christianity, fail to effect?

That they should be of Force, with the Ignorant, who understood them not; with the Rash, and Heedless, who wou'd not attend to them; with those, wedded to their Passions, who wou'd gladly turn aside, from Arguments; which were not easy to be pursued, and made out.

Secondly, Whatever their Condition was, with Regard to Morality, with Respect to Religion, it seems to have been much more deplorable: In the very first Traces of ancient

cient History that we have, we see the Custom introduced of setting up Idols, as Objects of Adoration; and worshipping the Spirits of departed Men; we see this Theology, spread out afterwards, and multiplied into an almost infinite Number of Deities. We observe the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, all learned, polite, and powerful Nations, notwithstanding this Refinement; abandon'd in general, to the lowest and most stupid Idolatry. Worshippers of the Statues of every Temple that was next at Hand; and often of the Images of the most vicious and abandon'd Men: Nay of the Beasts, and of the Vegetables, of the Earth: They serv'd them with an unaccountable, and ridiculous Worship; with weak, and childish Ceremonies; with cruel, and bloody Sacrifices; with Wickedness; and sometimes, with Lewdness not to be nam'd.

It is not material, here to urge, that their Philosophers, despis'd this Worship: The
World

World does not consist of Philosophers, but of Men; who, if not enlighten'd with the Knowledge of the true God, by other Means than Philosophers have ever yet discover'd; will make to themselves, such Objects of Worship, as their Heads can contrive; and whilst they are ignorant of the only true God, what can we expect, their Religion will be of? True Religion, is indeed the Worship of the True God, but for what is it intended, if not to lead us, to the Imitation of the True God? to make us like to him (so far as we are capable of resembling him) in Justice, Purity, Mercy, Goodness, and Truth. But how could they imitate, how possibly make themselves like to that Pattern, which the wise, and thinking, knew so doubtfully; and the greatest Part, knew not at all? Another Point the Heathens were ignorant of, and which certainly must be of Importance to know, was; a sure Method, to obtain Forgiveness of Sins: And of this, one wou'd imagine it natural
for

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for Men, who form'd a right Estimation of their own Defects, to entertain some Doubts. Every Sin we commit, is either a Violation of the Rights of our Neighbour, or it is an Injury to our own Health, and ease of Body; to our Innocence and Sanctity of Mind; or else it is an outrage and affront, to the Majesty, and Authority, of the supreme Lawgiver of the Universe; and not unfrequently, it is all of these Enormities united. What natural Assurance can an offender have, that his Sorrows, and even his Resolution of Amendment, can wipe away such Offences, and reconcile him to his Maker? Natural Reason, terrifies us with the Idea of God's necessary Justice: Christianity alone, can assure us that the rigorous Sentence, is temper'd by Mercy: That this Mercy is still in store for us, and that the Deity, will extend his fatherly Arms, to receive his penitent Children: Can Natural Religion do this, with such a Certainty, as to give sufficient Encouragement,

ment, to set about Reformation, and go thro' the Difficulties, of combating, the hourly Attacks of Passion, and the Inveteracy, of habitual Sin? It is hard for us to say, what wou'd be the Uneasiness of a Mind, in such a State, but certainly, if we consider Matters aright, we have the greatest Reason to bless God; that we know, there is a sufficient Sacrifice, and Satisfaction, offer'd up for our Sins; and that Faith in Christ, and true Repentance, will at all Times, be sufficient to secure us Pardon and Forgiveness.

One other important Point, the Heathens were ignorant of, was the Assistance of Gods Grace, and the secret Communication, of his holy Spirit: I can do all Things, (says the Apostle) thro' Christ, which Strengtheneth me, and certainly, whatever we might be able to do, without his Assistance; it is however, the greatest Encouragement to us, to exert ourselves to the
utmost

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utmost, when we consider that with this Help, if we be not wanting to ourselves, no Difficulty shall stand before us. On the other Hand, they who think they are left to themselves, when they find, after often striving they are always, foil'd by their Adversaries, and are unable to perform their Duty, with that Exactness they could wish; what Encouragement can they have to persist in the Attempt: May they not suspect, it is above their Abilities; and suffer Things to go as they may, since they cannot have them, as they desire? The small Uneasiness that appears to have been in the Heathens, on Account of the Inability of performing their Duty, or the obtaining Pardon for their Sins; and the small Account some Teachers of Christianity seem to make, of the Assistance of the Grace of God; are Matters of just Surprise: Whence can proceed their Boasts, of the natural Strength of Mankind, to perform what God requires of them? their Complaints, about our de-

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crying the natural Abilities of Mankind, and about our enlarging, on the Weakness, and Incapacity of Men, to perform their duty; when left to themselves? Whence can all this proceed? but from some Mistakes, about the true Duties of Christianity: or from miscounting their own Performances; and imputing that, to their own Strength, which the Religion of Christ tells us, should be ascrib'd to the Assistance, of the divine Grace. It is an easy matter, to miscalculate our own Performance; and I doubt not, there are many to be found, who because they refrain from the great, and notorious Transgressions of the Law, imagine that they have discharg'd the Sum of their Moral Duty: Whilst perhaps, their Hearts have very little of that charitable Temper, that social, forgiving, indulgent, humble Spirit, that marks the true Disciple of Christ. Such Men, mistake, or at least they but imperfectly enumerate, the Duties of Christianity, and must consequently err; when

when they come to cast up the Strength of their own Abilities, or the Sum of their Merit. If there be others, who do truly state their Christian Precepts; and find themselves well advanced in the Performance of them, it shou'd seem strange, that they shou'd impute all this merit to themselves; when the Gospel of Christ, so plainly tells us, we are to give all to the Glory of God, and to the Merit of his Grace which assists us. But, that I may not too much wander from my Subject, I shall only observe, that the Benefits arising from the Persuasion of this Assistance, are obvious, and considerable: It teaches us Humility, if not itself the chief; yet the principle of almost every Virtue, and at the same Time, it guards us against the gloomy Terrors of Despair. It sets our Performances upon a right Footing, and teaches us the true Merit of them; it directs us, where to apply for Assistance in Distress, it leads us to the Exercise of that great Duty, con-

stant Prayer; that essential Part of Religion, which is in itself most reasonable; and in its Effects, most useful; as it is indeed, an habitual Conversation with God; whom whilst we thus regularly address, we shall not lightly, venture to offend. Another material Point, the Heathen World were ignorant of, was the Certainty of a future State of Rewards and Punishments; which however some of them might collect from Arguments of good Probability; and many of them might wish for; yet certainly, it is one Thing to reason from doubtful Appearances; another to be assured of Truth, by an express Messenger from on high.

Among the many Advantages, Christianity has over Heathenism, may fairly also be counted, the positive Institutions of our Religion; Institutions which he who professes to despise, or lightly to esteem, takes upon himself to be wiser than the Founder of the Religion we profess. It is allow'd, these

these may be over valued as we have abundant Instances in the Church of Rome. But so may any other particular Act of Duty; if we substitute that, in the Place of the Whole. But it is said, these are confessedly Things of small Moment, compar'd with the Eternal, unalterable Rules of Morality. I believe, it is not attempted, to persuade Men to quit the Observance of moral Honesty, in order to be more punctual at the Sacraments of Christianity; we know our Saviour's Answer, in a Case allied to this; there is no need, nor can it be commendable in us to neglect either.

But some Men say, we do not see the Use of these positive Institutions: Were it even asserted we could see none; wou'd it be dangerous to venture to practice them, upon the sole Authority of Christ.

However, it is certainly of Advantage, to have stated Times, and solemn Acts of
Worship;

Worship; without which, Religion will scarcely be preserv'd: It is of Advantage, to be under Obligation, at those Times to consider of our Condition; whether, we observe the Religion we profess; whether, we fail not in any Duty; whether we improve, or fall off, in the Exercise of Piety and Virtue.

It is of advantage, at those Times, to be made Partakers of the Benefits of Christ's Death and Passion, and to receive Assistances of his Grace, which, (if we believe the Gospel) we have good Reason to look up to him for.

If these Advantages, are not sufficient, to determine us, to esteem and to observe these Institutions; I am indeed ignorant, of any that will.

These, seem to be among the more material Points, wherein the Heathen World were defective: They are so considerable,
that

S E R M O N I. 23

that it may well be concluded, that Information was wanting to them, and that they had sufficient Reason, joyfully to receive, any plain Instruction upon these Heads.

I should now proceed to the second Part I propos'd; namely to shew, whether Jesus Christ has actually supplied the Heathen World with that knowledge, and enlighten'd them in those Particulars which were requisite to be known; but the Arguments on this material Point, being copious and extensive, I shall defer their Consideration to a future Opportunity.

SERMON II.



S E R M O N II.

LUKE II. 30, 31 and part of 32 Verses.

*Mine Eyes have seen thy Salvation which thou
hast prepar'd before the Face of all People
a Light to lighten the Gentiles.*

IN a former Discourse upon this Subject,
I propos'd, two Points to be consider'd:
First, Whether the Nations of the Heathen
World, are rightly suppos'd, to have stood
in need of any other Knowledge, than
what their natural Reason cou'd afford them:
And Secondly, Whether Jesus Christ, has
actually supplied them with that knowledge,
which in consequence of the Investigation
then pursued, was found to be so highly
requisite.

In speaking to the former part of the
Subject, I endeavour'd to shew, that there
were several useful, nay necessary Points
of

S E R M O N II. 25

of Knowledge, which were really wanting to the Heathen World, to direct their Steps in the present State of intellectual Darknefs, the Chief of which were: First, The full and clear Knowledge of Morality, or of a right rule of Behaviour one towards another; Secondly, a right Knowledge of Religion, or of the true Method to please, and to worship, our Sovereign Creator:

Thirdly, the Certainty, that there will be a Life hereafter, in which good Men shall be rewarded for their Obedience, and the wicked punish'd for their Sins: Fourthly, the Knowledge of a sure effectual Method, to obtain Pardon of our Sins from God:

Fifthly, The Assurance of our being assisted in the Performance of our Duty, by the inward Communications of God's holy Spirit: Sixthly, The positive Institutions of Christianity, by which, at Baptism, we solemnly dedicate ourselves to him, and at

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the Lord's Supper, are oblig'd, frequently to confider, of our Lives and Conversations, whether we do indeed observe his Laws; and where we solemnly renew our Vows of Obedience to him. I proceed now, to the second Thing to be confider'd, whether Jesus Christ, has actually supplied Mankind with due Information on these important Subjects; whether he has enlighten'd them in those Points, supposed thus requisite to be known. And to this Question, they who examine fairly, and confider seriously, must necessarily answer that he has: Christ has been truly a Light to the Gentiles, and that upon these several accounts.

First, that he has indeed brought to Light those useful and necessary tho' before hidden Truths. Secondly, that he has sufficiently and fully prov'd those Truths. Thirdly, that he has so prov'd them as thereby to instruct and enlighten all Ranks, Degrees, and Conditions of Men.

S E R M O N II. 27

I assert then, that he has instructed us, in all useful, and necessary Truths, he has given us the shortest, the clearest, nay the strongest, and the best Rules of Morality; that ever were deliver'd to Men: He has inform'd us of the Nature and Properties, of that one, eternal, infinite, Almighty God, so far as it can be useful to us to know; he has in plain Words, and clear, laid before us, the Sum of the Duty that this God expects at our Hands; this Duty, he has declar'd, shall not be observ'd without sufficient Rewards, nor neglected without Punishment: He has laid before us, the Immortality of the Soul, the Resurrection of the Dead, and the endless Happiness, or Misery, of a future Life: He has inform'd us, upon what Conditions, God will forgive our Failings past; and be prevail'd upon to assist and prevent us for the future, with his Special Grace, and holy Spirit; he has set apart an Order of Men, to administer his Sacraments; and to awaken

the Attention, to those Institutions, by which we are bound by solemn Vows to Obedience ; and by which we are reminded frequently to renew these Sacred Obligations.

Having thus set before us, the true Light of immortal Life, and clear'd the Passage to it, he has open'd our Eyes, to the Knowledge of the most useful, serious, necessary, and important Truths; in every Circumstance of which, the Heathen Morality, was obviously deficient: Their different Systems, prove the Imperfection of all ; Their Polytheism, their Ignorance, of the Nature of God, and even amongst those who had the justest Notions of the Attributes of the Divinity, the Uncertainty of a future State, and the concomitant Rewards and Punishments thereof; left a Gap in their Philosophy, that human Reason alone was not able to fill up. But farther, Christ is most truly a Light to the World, because all that Truth which he taught, he did sufficiently, and fully prove.

Truth,

S E R M O N II. 29

Truth, until it receive a reasonable Proof, does scarcely deserve its Name. Present Pleasure, is a Thing certain to us, and Mankind are not so indifferent with Respect to it, as to forego and relinquish it, for weak Hopes, and doubtful Expectations, of something, that may possibly come to pass; to be efficacious, it must carry proof with it, not only forcible, but universal. If therefore, the Philosophers of old, had guess'd at much more than they really did, with Respect to our Duty here, yet whilst they were unable to bring other People, much less the whole World, to the Point of Certainty, and Assurance, it was not possible, that their Doctrine and Precepts, (tho' in themselves true) shou'd be of any great Use: Were all Men, of Capacities equal to Socrates, or Plato, a Revelation for the Instruction of Men, had not been so much wanted; they who are capable of abstract Reasoning, may certainly, see most Particulars of their Duty, with tolerable Clearness, and tho' they

they might be at a Loss, in some Points, which the Christian Revelation has laid open to us; yet for the main Part of their Duty, they might see it with sufficient Clearness: But Men who have Leisure, Abilities, and Opportunity, for these Researches; what Proportion do they bear to the Rest of the World? But it will be ask'd, what Advantage has the Christian Religion, in this Respect of Certainty; and how has Christ prov'd the Truth he is suppos'd to have brought to Light? It is confess'd, the proof of the Christian Revelation, is not of that evident abstract kind, by which, that which is properly call'd Knowledge, is demonstrated: It must be allow'd also, that it is an Affair, not lightly to be receiv'd, and that there should be, the most substantial Reasons, to determine our Belief. But then on the other Hand, it is no less certain, that the Truth of Christianity, is founded in History, and Certainty of Facts; to which that short and evident Proof, that is thus demanded, cannot

S E R M O N II. 31

not be applied: The Christian Religion, has its Arguments of sufficient Weight, not indeed, such as it is naturally impossible it should have; yet however, such as do not fail to be of prevailing and convincing Force.

Christ has prov'd his Doctrine, and given Certainty to that, and Light to the World, by his Miracles, by his Resurrection, by the Prophecies of the old Testament, by the Testimony and miraculous Works of his Apostles, and by the Conversion, of the whole Heathen World. The arguments, that prove Christ to have been a Teacher sent from God, do all conspire to add Strength, and Evidence, to his Doctrine. But what chiefly prepar'd the Way, for this Light, which he brought into the World; were the Miracles he wrought, before his first hearers the Jews. These were appointed by God in the old Testament, and are from the Light of Nature, allow'd to be marks of a
Power

Power deriv'd from God : and where we are sure, there is no Craft us'd to impose upon our Senses ; where the Miracles are many, open, and striking, where the Doctrine they are adduced to conform, falls in with our natural Opinions, and Notions of Things, and where they correspond with Prophecies, ancient, and allow'd ; in such Cases, Miracles give the greatest Authority, to the Truths they accompany ; that it is possible for them to receive.

Again, Christ, did fully prove his Doctrine by his Resurrection, and had he wrought no Miracle in his Life, but reserv'd the Proof of all, to his rising again after Death ; had he given this extraordinary Appearance, as the sole Attestation of his being sent from God ; he would have beyond Doubt, perform'd an Action, sufficient to convince Mankind of the Truth of that Light he brought amongst Them. The Proofs, that Jesus Christ gave of his Doctrine and Mission

S E R M O N II. 33

sion, were the miraculous Works, that he
 perform'd before the People, and his Re-
 surrection from the Dead: To these Mira-
 cles, and this Resurrection, we were not
 indeed Witneses; but must necessarily, re-
 ceive the Account thereof, from other Men:
 The Conveyance of those Proofs, the Me-
 thods, by which we have receiv'd them,
 were the Preaching and the Writings of his
 Apostles, who again confirm'd all these, by
 other Miracles, which they also wrought:
 Their preaching was hear'd, receiv'd and
 embrac'd; their Miracles recorded; their
 Writings believ'd by the best Judges; by
 those, in whose Times they liv'd: Their
 Writings were known and read publicly;
 they were in every Hand; they were depo-
 sited in different Places; translated into
 many Languages; receiv'd among divers
 People; and thro' these several Channels,
 have from one source, descended to us.
 This Testimony of such men, (vouched by
 Miracles of their own; confirm'd by the

F Simplicity

Simplicity, and Innocence of their Lives) who could have no Views of private Interest, to instigate them, but who on the contrary suffer'd Persecution, to divers cruel Deaths; this Testimony I say, is such as the Nature of the Subject will admit of; such as all Men are able to judge of; such as Mankind are us'd to yield to, and be determin'd by; it comes up to all, that reasonable Men can expect, and does fairly establish, the evidence of that Light, which Christ introduc'd amongst us. But further, this Testimony is a Proof, not only on Account of the Credit of the Persons who deliver'd it, but the Effects it soon after produced, which still add a farther Confirmation, to the Doctrine of Christ. By much the greater, and more considerable Part of the World then known, was in less than three Hundred Years after Christ, brought over to the Faith: They were brought, not by force of Arms, not by Men fam'd for Disputation, Philosophy, or human Learning:

S E R M O N II. 35

ing: They were persuaded to embrace a Religion, that founded harshly to its Hearers, that preach'd Mortification, and Denial of Worldly Pleasures: They were persuaded to a Religion, attended with the greatest, and most immediate Dangers; add to this, they were brought over from old Opinions against the prevailing Influence of Strong and deep rooted Prejudices.—That Age, and that part of the World, with whom the first Preachers of Christianity had to deal, did not consist of Men, ignorant and unlearned; there never was more human Knowledge, never more Enquirers after Truth; every one was anxious to hear, and discuss Novelty, St. Paul says, *all the Athenians and Strangers that were there, spent their Time in nothing else, but either to hear, or tell some new Thing*; there never was a more civilized, and Extensive Empire, never were more Means of discovering a Cheat, from the beginning of the World; there never was an Age, less liable to be impos'd

upon, and deceiv'd: Notwithstanding all this the Christian Religion came forth from a despis'd Land, in the Hands of a few Fishermen, ignorant and poor; yet in a short Time found Means to subdue that rich, and conquering; that learned, inquisitive, disputing Part of the World. It might well be ask'd, by what mighty Force and Power this was effected? In answer to this, I shall make but one Comment, upon the Fact: That such Performance, such Conversion of the Heathen Empire of Rome; may well be taken, for *one substantial Argument*; by which the Truth and certainty of the Doctrine of Christ has been prov'd.—If to these we add the Prophecies of the old Testament, and the surprizing Marks of the Messiah, fulfill'd in Christ; (which cannot properly be enlarged upon at present) we shall necessarily conclude, that Jesus Christ has been most truly a Light to the Gentiles; having not only discover'd to Mankind, truths, useful and necessary, but

but superadded to them, the most full, and sufficient Proofs.

But thirdly, Christ has so prov'd the Truth of this Revelation, as thereby to instruct the whole World, to give Light to all Ranks and Conditions of Men.—It is a common Objection, against the Usefulness and Necessity of the Christian Revelation, that Men are, and always have been, in a Capacity, fully and clearly to apprehend their Duty without it: It is said that the Duties of Morality, are evident, demonstrable and plain, and in them the Whole of Religion consists; but in Answer to this, it is manifest, that this Supposition is either not true in itself, or if it be allow'd for Truth; it is no Objection against the Usefulness of that Light, that Christ is suppos'd to have brought amongst Men; for if it be said, that all Men have, or may have naturally, a full and clear Knowledge of their Duty; this without Doubt is false; there being

being great Numbers of Men in the World, who neither know how they came here; what they were sent here to do; nor how to apply themselves, to find it out; such indeed before the coming of Christ was, the wretched Condition of all the lower and ignorant Classes of Mankind, in the Heathen World.

If it be said, that there have been some few Men who have clearly enough known how to direct their own Conduct, in Life: This is no Objection against the Usefulness of the Revelation of Christ, for still it must be allow'd, the Number of these being confessedly very small, that it was of great Use to send Instruction to the other Part of Mankind, which was the great Majority, and whose conduct, it was as necessary should be directed in this Life; and their Happiness be provided for in the next, as that of any small Number of Men, how considerable soever they may appear: And
this,

S E R M O N II. 39

this, (confidering the Nature of Man) a Revelation from God only, could provide for, and *that of Christ*, has fully done. The Generality of Mankind, are capable of Instruction in these Affairs by no other Mean than this: For, the Arguments, by which some Men are able to satisfy themselves of the Being of a God, and his Providence over the World, of a future State of Remuneration, and of the Duties we owe to ourselves, and other Men in this Life; these Arguments are not so plain, as to be universally, or easily understood; they require Time, Leisure, and Application, in such a Degree, as Numbers of Men have not to bestow: They are by no Means fit to convince and satisfy the generality of Men; and owe a great deal of this Evidence, as I have already remark'd to this Light, which we have receiv'd already from Christ; and which operates without our own Knowledge, to dispose us to admit the Arguments deduc'd on this Subject, from other Sources.

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The arguments by which christianity has been introduced, the Arguments by which every Matter of Fact is to be prov'd; of these, every Man is able to reason and judge. Were there old Writings delivered to the People of the Jews, full of the Characters of one particular extraordinary Messenger to come from God; and to arise from amongst them? Are these Books now in the World; and these Passages still to be found therein? Is there now a Religion instituted by Jesus of Galilee, who took upon him to be that Messenger promis'd to the World; is this Religion deriv'd to us through many Generations, who first receiv'd it from Men invested with miraculous Powers; & preaching Peace and Charity to the World, in defiance of Difficulties, Dangers, and certain Death to themselves? Do their Books received by the World then, and convey'd thro' numberless Hands, necessarily lead us back; and do those of the Jews, preserv'd by themselves, as Records *against* themselves;

S E R M O N II. 41

themselves; and Testimonies *for* this Christ, whom they still deny; do these I say, point forward and do both aim at, and centre in this one Person, whose Life and Actions, have been foretold in the one, and recorded in the other? Did he affirm himself a Teacher sent from God; did many and great Works, bear Witness to his Words, did his rising from the Dead confirm them all? These and such like, are the Arguments on which Christianity is built; and these are Arguments, that every Man is able to comprehend. Religion, by these Means, and every thing therein, can descend to the Understanding of the meanest of Mankind. The busy, the uneducated Part of the World are taught by a Method, the most short and clear; every Part of their Duty, is prov'd with equal Force, and every Part is urg'd upon them, as the positive, and immediate Will of God; without this, the Deductions of Reason, would be of little Use to the World; few would venture on the Pains and

G Study,

Study, that are necessary to get thro' them; very few are able to do this with success: Many would be unwilling, to see and be persuaded of these Truths; and consequently they would be able to influence, scarcely any at all.—Jesus Christ therefore, has been truly a Light to the Nations of the Earth; having, not only instructed them in useful Truth, but having prov'd that Truth, and prov'd it by Arguments, suited to the Conviction and Satisfaction of all Degrees, and Conditions of Men. To what has been said, I shall add only this; if we do really believe, the Religion introduced by Christ, and contain'd in his Gospel, to be an Instruction sent to Mankind, from God; we should do wisely, to observe and obey it: To attend to these Doctrines, and these Commands, that are, (to all Judgment) right and reasonable in themselves; the Observance of which, is for the good of the Whole, for the Happiness of all the Parts; for the true Satisfaction and Peace, of every Individual,

Individual, that improve and exalt our Nature, that enable us more decently to get thro' the little Business of this Life; that make us more worthy Worshipers of the infinite Being here; more fit to appear in his presence hereafter.

We are the Descendants of those Gentiles for whom this Light was intended, for whom it was sent into the World: And we are carefully to consider, for what end it was sent us: But, if we make not a right Use of this Light, we had much better never to have seen it; we had much better have continued in heathen Darknes, than by Profligacy of Manners, (whilst we pretend to receive and embrace this Light) crucify the Son of God afresh, and put him to open Shame.—Let us therefore, my Brethren, address ourselves earnestly to God, to assist us with his Grace, in prosecuting that Godliness of Life, that as reasonable Creatures, we must prefer; As Christians, we are bound

to, by every tie of Gratitude, and by the most solemn Vows that can be entered into by Men. And may that infinite God, second our Endeavors, through the Merits, and Intercession of his only Son; our Saviour. Amen.

SERMON III.



S E R M O N I I I .

TITUS II. 11th and 12th Verses.

*The Grace of God, that bringeth Salvation,
hath appeared to all Men, teaching us that
denying Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, we
should live soberly, righteously and godly in
this present World.*

IN these few Words, St. Paul conveys to
us the fullest Account of the Nature and
Design of Christianity: My present purpose
is, not to dwell upon the various Topics
here suggested by the Apostle, but by a short
Illustration of the Text, to endeavour to
convey to your Minds, some Idea of that
State of Things, which would begin to shew
itself in the World, were the Religion of
Christ rightly understood, and zealously
practis'd

practis'd: With a view thereby to mark the Connection that subsists between the genuine Spirit of Christianity, & the Real Interests of Society; a Design, which if duly executed, cannot fail to be of considerable Use; as Objections have been urg'd by certain Writers of Eminence, as if Christianity had been useless; nay prejudicial to Society.

The Grace of God, which bringeth Salvation hath appeared unto all Men.—Here we find the Origin, the Universality and general Intent of the Gospel; we see that it was not fabricated by Men, it came from above; it was the Grace or the Gift of God, and like all other Gifts, design'd for the Benefit of the Receivers: Being the Gift of the Father of Mercy, and God of Consolation, it *must* be calculated, to diffuse Mercy and Comfort amongst his Creatures; issuing from the God of *Order and Peace*, it could never be design'd to give rise to Tumults and War; proceeding from the God of Holiness

S E R M O N III. 47

liness and Life; it could never be intended, to enlarge the Empire of Sin and Death: It came, bringing Salvation, or Deliverance from every Enemy; and it came to All, without distinction of Sex, Age, Country or Condition.

It appear'd, it shone forth manifesting itself by its own Splendor, like the Day-Spring from on High, free, bright and universal. It appear'd to dispel Ignorance as Darknefs; and to disseminate Knowledge as Light; to inform and instruct Mankind, putting us under the discipline of a divine Master, who teaches us to avoid evil and pursue good; and *who alone* can enable us to perform either with effect: This divine Teacher's Documents, excel all others, with Respect to the Benefits accruing to civil Society; in Proportion as it is better that Men should practise Virtue, than that they should Write, or Speak of it.—This is the Triumph of the Gospel, of the Grace of God which hath
appeared

appeared unto all Men, teaching us, that denying Ungodliness and worldly Lufts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present World, denying, disclaiming, forsaking iniquity, and every Species of Irreligion: Whether Disbelief of the Deity, or mistaken Notions of his Nature, Attributes, Providence, or the Manner in which he is to be Worshipped; with all the erroneous, and abominable Practices, consequent thereupon. How baneful these are to the Interests of Society, must be known to every Person at all conversant in the History of the *Heathen* World; and under similar Circumstances, the Case must be the same in every Age: The Actions of Men, necessarily take a deep Colour, from the Tincture of their religious, or irreligious Principles. The Man who believes in a Deity, will naturally wish to imitate him, whilst the Unbeliever, has neither Guide to his Conduct, nor support to his Resolution.

To

S E R M O N III. 49

To the words, denying Ungodliness, the Apostle adds worldly Lufts, by which we understand, those desires whose Objects are worldly, and fought after by worldly Men, by undue Means, or in an inordinate Manner, beyond the Limits, design'd by God, and pointed out by Nature: And what is it, but the Prosecution of such desires, that fills the World with Misery; producing Luxury and Extravagance, amongst some, Poverty and Wretchedness, among others, hateful Quarrels and vexatious Suits, between Individuals and Families; ravaging and desolating Wars, between Princes and Kingdoms; Factions and Tumults in the State, and we may add generally, Heresies and Divisions of the Church; since the Apostle has class'd *Them* likewise, among the Works of the Flesh.—Let not vain Man then, under the Name and Notion of Philosophy, insult and revile, as a monkish and solitary Principle; that Doctrine, on which the Son of Man has thought proper to lay

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the deep Foundation of his Religion; the Doctrine of Self Denial. In the present State of human Nature, the desires of *self* are too frequently, the sickly Cravings of a distemper'd Being; the Gratification of them would only tend to increase and inflame the Disease, and therefore we are in *Mercy*, enjoin'd to *deny* them.

We now proceed to the *positive* part of the Injunction of the Apostle, that we are to live *soberly*, the Expression applied here, is deduc'd from a Word, signifying one of a sound Mind; one that is Master of himself; having his Passions and Appetites, in due Order and Subjection: Since, of *each* of these, if suffer'd to domineer, may be said, what has been often said of *one* of them; that it is a temporary Madness. Thus when the Prodigal in the Parable, is describ'd as repenting of his Profligacy, the Expression made use of is, he came to himself, the Phrase intimating, that while engag'd

S E R M O N III. 51

engag'd in his former Courfe, he was *not* himself: The governing Principle, had been dethron'd; and he had been carried away Captive, at the will of his unbridled Paſſions.

If we confider this Sobriety, as implying the Regulation of our Appetites, it ſupplies us with the Virtues of Temperance, as oppos'd to Intemperance of every kind; and Industry, as oppos'd to Sloth; and where is the State, that would not wiſh all its Subjects to be temperate, and induſtrious? Look at the Generations of old, and conſult the Ages that are paſt; enquire of Kingdoms that were once great, that now live only in the Records of Hiſtory; aſk them, and with one Voice they will tell you, that by theſe Virtues they all aroſe to Greatneſs, Glory, and Honor; by their Contraries; they funk into Ruin, Shame, and Reproach.—We ſhould learn then, as good Citizens, duly to value that Religion, which upon the Grounds

of true Reason, and eternal Wisdom; with such persuasive Energy, recommends and enjoins the Practice of these Virtues, holding them forth to View, in the Example of our divine Master, and his first Followers. A Glutton, a Drunkard, a Debauchee, a Sluggard, are Monsters in the Gospel System.—*There* we see a Religion, which is composed of Sobriety and Purity, Fervor and Alacrity; there we find prescribed to us strict Temperance *always*; prudent Abstinence *often*, and why? That we may not be brought under the Power of Appetite, and thus enslav'd to so unrelenting a Tyrant. There we are directed, whether we eat or drink, or whatever we do, to do all to the Glory of God, as if the World were one great Temple, and every *good Man* thro' the Course of his Actions and Life, a kind of perpetually officiating Priest, in this Grand and extensive Structure.—But Sobriety goes farther, it comprehends the Government, not of the bodily Appetites only, but
of

of the Affections of the Mind : Christianity informs us, of the proper Objects on which the Passions should be fix'd, and *enables* us to fix them on those Objects.—It's Injunction runs, thus; set your Affections on Things above; on Objects, in the pursuit of which, they may put forth all their Strength; and in the Enjoyment of which, they may acquiesce with Complacency. Upon the Principle of the Insufficiency of earthly Gratifications, the Gospel, in the Heart where it is receiv'd; moderates and regulates the Passions, in their Application to terrestrial Objects : It restrains the Sallies of Anger, that it sin not; it stops the Issues of dislike; it represses Insolence in Joy, and prevents Clamor or Despondency in Grief; it forbids Presumption in hope, and bridles the Impetuosity of desire; it permits not fear to transgress the bounds of a prudent Caution, and mitigates even Courage; which, without it becomes a savage Forocity : It balances the Mind, in every State and Fortune,

tune, it produces Modesty, Meekness, Patience, Candour, Impartiality, and out of these Ingredients, forms that Sobriety of Character, intended by the Apostle: And what is it, but this same Sobriety, this command of the Passions, this self Government, that qualifies a Man to discharge properly, all the relative Duties of Life; that endears him to a Community, and renders him a truly useful, and valuable Member of Society?

From that Part of a Man's Duty, which regards himself, and is express'd by the Word soberly; we pass to that which Respects his Neighbour. We are also enjoin'd to live righteously, or justly, according to the proper, and original Meaning of the Word, giving to all their due.—What that due is the Gospel hath ascertain'd, not like the *mere Moralists*, by a System of *Rules* only; but by infusing a Principle of *Charity*, which reduces the Law within the narrowest compass;

S E R M O N III. 55

compass; and teaches the Whole at once, in its greatest Extent.—The Gospel tells us we should love our Neighbour, as ourself; and that “ *whatsoever ye would that Men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them:* ”

A Precept this, which enables every Man to be his own Casuist; and puts it *out of his Power*, to determine unjustly a Precept, which should be engrav'd on every Heart, as it was by a Roman Emperor, on the Walls of his Palaces, and public Buildings; the universal Rule of Life, the moral Directory, of the World!

Reflect! what an Appearance Society would wear, if Men acted upon this evangelical Principle.—In superiors, it would be Equity and Moderation, Courtesy and Affability, Benignity and Condescension: In Inferiors, Sincerity and Fidelity, Respect and Diligence: In Princes, Justice, Gentleness and Solitude, for the Welfare of their Subjects: In Subjects, Loyalty, Submission,

mission, Obedience, Quietness, Peace, Patience, and Chearfulness : In *all* Men, upon *all* Occasions ; a readiness to assist, to relieve and to comfort one another ; justifying the Exclamation of a modern Writer : How admirable the Religion ; which, while it seems only to have in view, the Felicity of another Life ; constitutes the Happiness of this.

In Addition to the Precepts which I have already consider'd ; the Apostle adds that we should live godly ; this word conveys the Idea of every thing that relates to the Acknowledgment, and Worship of God ; of Devotion, Piety, or of *Religion* properly so call'd ; as distinguish'd from Morality ; here it is, that we must look for the Main-Spring and Principle of Action ; for Motives to Virtue, *capable* of controlling the Appetites ; regulating the Passions, and overcoming every Obstacle, opposed by Self Love ; to the Practice of Justice and Charity,

S E R M O N III. 57

rity, among Men. Godlinefs is profitable unto all Things, having Promise of the Life that now is, as well as of that which is to come; and even they, who assert Religion to have been the Invention of Priests and Politicians, to keep the World in Order; do thereby confess that it is at least good for that Purpose. Human Words and Actions, highly pernicious to Society, how many are there not cognizable at any earthly Tribunal? Yet our Happiness or Misery, in our Converse with others; depends upon the Regulation of these. Now implant but a thorough Sense of Religion in the Mind, teach a Man to consider himself as always acting, speaking, nay even thinking, in the presence of that Being, that seeth in Secret, but will one Day, reward or punish openly; you thus stop the Stream at the Source; and staunch at once, the very Fountain of Corruption.

Of Crimes that are cognizable by Courts of Judicature, how few would fall under
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their Sentence, were it not for the Obligation which Religion lays upon those Persons to speak the Truth; by whose Evidence, the Facts in Question, must be prov'd and ascertain'd.

There is a Connection between Religion, and Morality, like that between Soul and Body; not to be dissolv'd without the Death of the latter.—Speculative Men may amuse themselves and others with Disquisitions on the Beauty of Virtue, and the Relations of Things, independently of the Will of God, and the Motives suggested by the Scriptures. Virtue without doubt is beautiful, and there *are* Relations of Things, with corresponding Duties resulting therefrom. But will these Considerations charm to rest the eager Appetites, and turbulent Passions of human Nature? As well might you think to bind an hungry Tyger with a Thread.—But observe the firm Basis, on which is for ever fix'd, the Morality of the Gospel: How clear in it's Principles;

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Principles; how powerful in it's Motives! We love God because he loved us, and gave his Son for our Sakes: If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another: For he that loveth him who begat, loveth him also, who is begotten of him.—The Head of the most unlearned, cannot but comprehend the Meaning of these few Words; and the Heart of the most Learned, must feel the force of them. Such is the Ground of that Charity, which as I before observ'd, performeth every Duty of social Life, and fulfilleth the Law. To inculcate and produce in us this heavenly Disposition, is the End of the Gospel, and all it's Doctrines.—Indeed, the happy Temper of which I am speaking, is the natural and kindly Effect of the great evangelical Truths; where treasur'd up in the Mind, and made the Subject of frequent Meditation. The Ideas of a reconcil'd God; a Saviour and Intercessor on high; a gracious Spirit, informing our Ignorance, purifying our Hearts, relieving our Necessi-

ties ; alleviating our Cares ; and comforting our Sorrows ! Such Ideas enable us to bridle the Appetites of the Body, and calm the Emotions of the Mind, and to bear with Patience and Cheerfulness, the Calamities of Life : they sweeten the Temper & harmonize the Affections ; resolving them all into one ; diversified, according to the different Situation of it's proper Object ; of which, Grief laments the Absence, and fear apprehends the Loss ; desire pursues it ; hope has it in View ; Anger rises against Obstruction ; and Joy triumphs in Possession.

Thus Religion fixes the Heart on it's Treasure : in Faith, without wavering and Resignation without reserve ; it draws the Affections toward Heaven, as the Sun does the Exhalations of the Earth, to return in fruitful Showers, and bless the World.

Such is the friendly Aspect which Christianity represented by the Apostle in this
striking

S E R M O N III. 61

striking Passage, evidently bears to the true interests of civil Society: I shall therefore conclude with this short Remark, that if you wish to be good Citizens; remember, you must be first good Christians.

SERMON IV.



S E R M O N IV.

General Epistle of ST JAMES, Chap II.
and 10th Verse.

*For whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and
yet offend in one Point, he is guilty of all.*

IF Men cannot be induc'd to think for
themselves, but rest indolently satisfied,
with the first Interpretation that is presented
to them, of any particular Text in Holy
Scripture, it is highly probable that they
will be misled.—A cautious discernment of
their Heart is requisite to be certain that their
Judgment

Note.—As this Subject has been similarly illustrated,
in an excellent Sermon lately Published; it may be not
improper to observe, that it appears from the Date of
this M. S. that our Author's Sermon, was written and
preached, previous to the Publication of the present
Bishop of London's truly Elegant and Christian Discourses.

S E R M O N IV. 63

Judgment is not bias'd by their Wishes; and of their Temper, that they may not be too easily sway'd by the Authority of others, whose worldly Interest often inclines them to represent the strict Compliance, with the Christian duty; of more apparent Difficulty than it really is; thus to palliate those particular Deviations from it, which they cannot conceal from the Eyes of the World. Perhaps there are few Passages in Scripture, that requir this Caution, more than the one I have chosen for our present Consideration, "*For whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, he is guilty of all.*"

This truly Moral and Christian Passage, has been represented, as implying a Contradiction in Terms; that of keeping the whole Law, and yet offending in one Point; an Objection, which if admitted in it's fullest Extent, amounts to no more than a verbal inaccuracy: As such an *intentional* mode of arguing, would certainly not be a
very

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very rational one for *any* Man to apply, to inforce *any* Doctrine.—By others, it has been so interpreted, as to terrify Men of the best Dispositions to Virtue, to such a Degree, as amounts to that State of mental Despair, which it is the Duty of every Christian Teacher to endeavour to remove.

In the Examination of this Passage then, I shall pursue the following Method : I shall first endeavour to clear it from this Contradiction in Terms.—I shall then shew, what I think, the Apostle does *not* mean by it, and thence perhaps, we shall be better enabled to judge of, what he does mean to inculcate ; and thus to remove that Despondence, which sometimes oppresses, tender and virtuous Minds.—Some Difficulties as I observ'd, with which this Passage is charg'd, arise from the grammatical Construction, as if the Words implied, that a Man *might* keep the *whole* Law ; and *yet* offend in *one* Point.—Now these Words, whosoever shall keep the
whole

S E R M O N IV. 65

whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, cannot be understood Specially, of all and singular, the Precepts which the Law comprehends, for it is manifest, that he who keeps each and singularly, the precepts which the Law comprehends, cannot at the same Time be truly said to offend in *any* Point. But by offending in one Point at any Time he is guilty of a Breach of the Law, or as it may be said, of the *whole Law*; collectively taken for a System or a Body of Precepts; each and every of which are to be observ'd; and if in any one Branch, the System be infrig'd; that single Violation is sufficient to denominate a Man, a Transgressor of the Law in general, because that general Law thro' his Default is no longer kept whole and entire.

But any Man who *chooses* to understand these Words, will immediately see that tho' in Sound they are universal, yet they manifestly carry with them the Exception. Com-

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pare the Passage in St. Mathew, *all manner* of Sin and Blasphemy shall be forgiven unto Men; but the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall *not* be forgiven unto Men.—Where, by *all Manner* of Sin and Blasphemy cannot be understood, each particular species, and distinct Kind of Sin and Blasphemy, distributively taken; for then the Sin against the Holy Ghost must have been one of the Number; and consequently capable of Forgiveness: But the meaning plainly is, “All Manner of Blasphemy, shall be forgiven, the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, only excepted;” and so it must be here interpreted, Whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one Point, he is guilty of all: That is, whosoever shall keep the whole Law, *one Point only* excepted, he is guilty of all.

Other Difficulties with which the Text is charged, arise from the Misapprehension of the Apostles meaning; and from too readily embracing

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embracing Inferences, which tho' they may at first Sight seem to follow from it; yet are beyond Dispute, contrary to the Spirit of the Text, as well as to Reason and Equity; it may not therefore be ineffectual towards knowing what the Apostle really does mean; to consider a little, what it is he cannot be supposed to intend.

And first, it cannot possibly be the Apostles meaning, that he who commits one Sin, does by that single Fact, contract the Guilt of all other Sins.—That he who pilfers, for Example, is guilty of Murder and Adultery; so absurd is this Notion, that it may at any Time be reduc'd to a Contradiction in itself; for one and the same Person, may according to this Explication, at one and the same Time be guilty of Contraries.—Thus whilst the Miser starves himself, and is as effectually in Want as the Beggar he turns from his Door; he is by this Rule a Spendthrift, a Glutton, and a Drunkard.

Nor secondly, can the Apostle be supposed to mean to destroy all Difference between one Sin and another; and to teach that the Guilt of all Sins is the same, and their Malignity equal; that tattling is as execrable as Blasphemy; that he who tells Lies perhaps with some Interruptions from natural Modesty, and possibly to no more mischievous Effects than the Ruin of his own insignificant Credit; that such a Trifler, is equally a Delinquent with the deliberate Perjuror, who with cool, and desperate Intrepidity, forswears himself; where the Property, or the Life of his Neighbour, is at stake; that he who pilfers from his Neighbour is guilty of a Crime as shocking as he who murders him.—This *cannot* be the Doctrine of the Apostle; he *cannot* mean to say that the Guilt of Blasphemy, Perjury, Incest, and Murder, is the same with that of every other Transgression:—much less, that he who is guilty of the Whole frightful Combination, is no more Criminal, than he who has offended,

S E R M O N IV. 69

fended, in *one Instance* only; and this, because such a Doctrine is contrary to Reason, and neither reconcilable to other Passages in Scripture, or to the Tenor of the whole.— For we read of a Sin unto Death; and a Sin not unto Death. That Men shall be beaten with more, or with fewer Stripes; and where *some* are threaten'd with a *greater* Damnation.—But if the finish'd Sinner will look into his own Breast, he will soon perceive that there are very different Degrees of Guilt, and very different Degrees of Remorse attending that Guilt.

But the Doctrine really convey'd by the Text, and the true Meaning of the Apostle is this.—That an universal Obedience to all the Laws of God, without reserve, and without Exception; is requir'd from us, and cannot be evaded or supplied by a *partial* Observance; that is by a strict Observance of some, and an absolute neglect of other Duties; no, not by a punctual Observance
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of the whole Law, save *one single* Point, provided always our Neglect of that single Point be habitual, and that we offend in it wilfully and knowingly.

And the Reasonableness of this Doctrine will appear from many Considerations; and first, that he who offends only in one Point of the Law, offends however against the Author of the *whole Body* of Laws; against that *Authority* upon which all other Points depend; and from which they derive their Force and Obligation.—God is the Author of these Laws, and the Ground of our Obedience to them ought to be, *that He is the Author* of them.—That they are enacted, by that Almighty Authority which commands the Observance of them, *all equally*. Whoever therefore dispenses with *one* of them, does he not arraign the Author of the Whole? May he not with equal Right, dispense with the Whole? But the Truth is he allows himself in *this*, & not in *that* particular
wilful

S E R M O N IV. 71

wilful Transgression, because the one *is* & the other is *not* the Sin of his Inclination; or because he happens to be under greater Temptation to the one, than the other; or because one Sin may be more within his reach and Capacity than another.—He may be virtuous in some Points, because neither his Constitution, nor his Fortune, will allow him to be otherwise: He may be virtuous upon the very same Principle that he is vicious; because he finds his *Profit* or *Convenience* in being so: A settled Sense of Duty arising from the Will of God, is as little concern'd in producing his Virtues, as it is in producing his Vices.—So that, if the Case were put, of his being under the same Temptation, to any *other* Sin; what *imaginable* Cause can be assign'd, why he should not be under the same Subjection to it? But is this serving God? Can a Service so insincere, so halting, so devoid of Principle; be receiv'd by God, as Obedience and reasonable Service! And is not this the

Objection

Objection the Apostle himself urges against partial Obedience, in the Verse immediately following, and Explanatory of the Text? “He that said, do not commit Adultery! said also, do not kill!” if therefore, thou commit not Adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a Transgressor of the Law.—Is not the Apostles Argument plainly this? That all those Laws have one and the same Author, and are supported by one and the same Sanction, the *Command* of that Author.

But again, he who offends, in any one Point of the Law with Presumption of Pardon, nay of Toleration, in that single Offence; tho’ he strictly observes the other Points, does by that absurd Notion of partial Obedience, destroy the very Attributes of God.—For how can he suppose, that God allows the Practice of any one Sin in *him*, without supposing that he allows in one Man or other, the Practice of *all* Sin.—If every Man is to be indulg’d in *one* Vice, because

S E R M O N IV. 73

cause a favourite one, as every Man has an equal right to expect that Indulgence, and all Men have not the same favourite Vice, (which certainly they have not, or Vices would not have distinct Names) there is no Sin could be nam'd, that would not be conniv'd at, by the God of Purity.

What a strange Idea of divine Toleration, of Wickedness of all Degrees, and Denominations! provided no two Vices meet in one and the same Person.

Nor let the Offender in one Point, plead his Obedience in all others, 'till he has consider'd of what Force such a Plea would be, before a *Human* Tribunal; if convicted of a Capital Offence, he should not only expect Pardon, but Toleration to continue in that Offence, because he had kept the whole Law of the Land, save *that one Point*; nor let him dismiss this Allusion to Civil Government, 'till he has consider'd further,

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what Fruitlessnefs of Law and Policy, what utter Diffolution of Society muft follow; if every Subject could with Impunity, (provided he was amenable in other refpects) break thro' that Law, which restrain'd the moft governing, and the moft impetuous Paffion of his Mind.

But let us now confider, the Infecurity of partial Obedience: What Man can pretend to fay he will continue to keep the whole Law fave one Point? What Man can pretend to fay he does it? There is Self Deceit at the Bottom of fuch a thought: The whole Tribe of Vices is fo clofely connected, they unite imperceptibly with each other, nay fometimes (if I may fo fay) feem to require one another. Murder tho' not originally intended, has been often perpetrated, to cover *Crimes* lefs heinous.—An habitual Defiance of Virtue, in one Point, will at leaft make the *Practice* of it in all others, appear of lefs Confequence: and as

S E R M O N IV. 75

we know the second Trespafs in any given Vice, is committed with less Violence to Conscience, than the first; so let us not imagine that the Progress, from one Degree of the *same* Vice to another, is more easy than the Transition, from one *Vice* to another.— And this suggests another Argument against the Insecurity of this partial Obedience, for it is an obvious Question to ask, should a Man keep the whole Law save one Point, can he be always sure that *this* Point, will be invariably the same.—The Young Man in the Career of Gaiety and Dissipation; if during some involuntary Leisure, he reflects upon his Course of Life, how he indulges himself in Vices, which he knows to be contrary to the Will of God; comforts himself notwithstanding, that the Love of Pleasure is “*natural to his Youth;*” and hopes his Obedience in *other* Points will atone; he is strictly honourable, generous, and detests the Baseness of Oppression.—The Man more advanced in Years, who (at the Age

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of the former) had probably the same Plea, for the same unwarrantable Indulgence, now changes the Pursuit, barter his Honesty for Ambition, but thinks this single Point venial; because even *sensual* Indulgence he has given up: presently his Prospects in this Line are darken'd; he shrinks under the Disappointments of Ambition, and finds as Age advances, that Money only can procure that sedulous Attention, for which Age languishes; he becomes a Miser, and wishes all Mankind were as exact, and Punctual, and as free from other Vices as he is.

Here then a new Scene opens to us, we find that the single Act of Obedience, we desire to be excus'd from, is not always the same; but Shifts with the different Stages, and Periods of Life; it varies as our Idea of Pleasure does, so that the Man who means to keep the whole Law save one Point may run thro' the whole Circuit of Vice, in the Period of a short, and anomalous Life.

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S E R M O N. IV. 77

We see then manifestly, that the Apostle could not mean less than an universal, or permit me to use the Expression, an indiscriminate Obedience to the Laws of God. What the Measure of this Obedience is, requires Attention.—It is said in favor of partial Obedience, that God is all wise, knows the Weakness of our Nature, and the Strength of our Temptations; that he is also merciful and just; when therefore he gave us a Law upon the Observance of which, our Salvation was to depend; his Justice, and Mercy were oblig'd to give us a Capacity to perform the Service requir'd; but an entire Observance of the whole Law, is beyond our Capacity; and God therefore cannot require more than a partial Obedience.—But this Argument may and must be retorted.—Since God is all wise, since he *does* know the Weakness of our Nature, and the Strength of our Temptations; and since he is withal, just, good, and merciful, and *yet has* required our Obedience, to every
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Command of the Law ; (as Scripture shews us he has,) it would be a much fairer inference, that the Obedience he has so expressly commanded, is within our Capacity to perform.—And so indeed it will appear to be.

For this Objection, drawn from the impossibility of observing the Precept of the Text, is grounded upon a mistaken Notion of the Precept; for the Doctrine of universal Obedience does not require an unfinning Obedience to the whole of the Law, free from particular Acts of Transgression: *Who* has ever obey'd any one Law ! much less the whole, in that extended Sense ? The best of Men confess, (and perhaps are most ready do so) that in many things they offend ; but it demands, that we should obey all God's Laws equally, and we can certainly obey one Law of God, as well as another, tho' our Obedience to every one, be attended with Imperfections.

Should

S E R M O N IV. 79

Should it be urg'd, that we find greater difficulty in obeying some Laws than others, the Fault I fear is in ourselves, it is a failure from Habit, for which we are beyond Dispute responsible.—For altho' for the wise Œconomy of Nature, the Author of our Being has implanted in us Appetites and Passions of powerful impulse; & some more prevalent than others, & this for wise Purposes; yet the Direction of the former, to proper Objects, and the Regulation of the latter, is our Province and our Duty.—If therefore we complain of the Difficulty of observing some Laws more than others, we may be assur'd the Fault is in ourselves, thro' Habits wilfully contracted, want of Observation, and continual Controul of the more powerful Affections; and therefore tend to aggravate our Guilt, from the uncheck'd Reiteration of our Offences.

Permit me to add a few Words, for the
Consolation of those, who use their best En-
deavours

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deavours in the course of Virtue ; and yet are terrified, by the Degree of Observance enjoin'd.—They find in Scripture, Injunctions, “ To be pure as God is pure,” Merciful as he is merciful; Perfect, as our Heavenly Father is Perfect.—Comparing these Precepts with the Words of the Text now before us, they despond thro’ a Notion that absolute Perfection in all and every Branch, is expected from them.—These Injunctions certainly require that we should set God before us, as the great Pattern of our Lives and Actions, but we are only required to imitate, not expected to equal, and surely without grammatical Criticism, common Sense will mark a difference between the two Expressions : Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect; and this, be ye *as* perfect, as your Father which is in Heaven, the former only commands Imitation, but indicates no Equality; this is too obvious to require that I should dwell upon it.—I must however add one Argument

S E R M O N IV. 81

ment to shew that an unfinning Obedience; (such as is not the Lot of human Nature) cannot be expected at our Hands.—The Scripture does not deal in Contradiction; we find in it, the comfortable Doctrine of Repentance; now, if an unfinning Obedience were demanded, the perfect Man would require no Repentance; and to the Man who had once deviated in the smallest Degree, Repentance would be useless: Yet this is the Doctrine particularly insisted on by our Saviour, and one principle Blessing of his Mission.

If the Commands of God seem to demand at any time the highest Perfection, let us consider that they are the Commands of God who is perfect, and who therefore cannot command any Degree of Virtue less than Perfection, the more perfect the Model, the more exalted will our Ideas be towards Imitation, altho' he cannot expect from us, and tells us that he will not require more than the

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Measure our Abilities can produce, provided they be exerted; upon the whole those may be said to keep the whole Law, without offending in one Point, who have Respect to *all* the Commands of God; and who endeavour sincerely, and to the best of their Power to observe them all.—This uniform endeavour to do right, and a Resolution to amend where we do wrong, if sincere will we humbly trust, be accepted *as Perfection*, by the God of all Goodness, thro' the Merits of Jesus Christ.

SERMON V.



S E R M O N V.

PROVERBS XV. v. 1.

A soft Answer turneth away Wrath.

THE Book of Proverbs is a Miscellany of Sentences full of various and profound Wisdom ; such Sentences as ought to have a special Authority over us, in the Direction of our Conduct, as they instruct us in the Customs, Vices and Humours of Men, and direct us how to pass through the active Part of Life, with Advantage to the Public, and Satisfaction to our own Minds.

As there is no greater evidence of Wisdom than the due Regulation of our Words, so there is no Subject on which the wise Man doth more frequently insist.—And amongst

the many Rules which he prescribes to us, towards the Attainment of this End, that of Mildness and Meekness, both as to the Matter and Manner of them is one of the most considerable, “ She openeth her Mouth with Wisdom, and in her Tongue is the Law of Kindness.” And again, “ A soft Answer turneth away Wrath.” The meaning of which is sufficiently obvious, that a meek & gentle Manner of Discourse, is the most effectual Means to soften the fiercest Disposition, and subdue the most outrageous Passion: And as this requires no further Explanation, I shall proceed in the first Place, to illustrate the Truth of this Proposition, by some Examples from Scripture History.—I shall then endeavour to account for this Prevalence of Meekness over Wrath, and shall conclude with an Attempt to reconcile this Doctrine of Meekness, with the Doctrine of Reproof enjoin’d in Scripture, under which Head I shall make some Observations with Respect to the seeming Imprecations and
Curfes

S E R M O N V. 85

Curfes in the Pfalms of David.—In the 13th Chapter of Genesis, there is a lively Description of the Mildnefs and Candor of Abraham allaying the Difference which had arifen and might have been dangerously inflam'd between the Servants of Lot and him. Let there be no Strife I pray thee between me and thee, and between my Herdmen and thy Herdmen, for we be Brethren; is not the whole Land before thee; feparate thyfelf I pray thee from me; if thou wilt take the left Hand, then I will go to the Right; or if thou depart to the Right Hand, then I will go to the Left.

In the 32d of the fame Book we have the Story of the Meeting of Efau with his Brother Jacob: Efau was a rough Man both in his inward Difpofition and outward Behaviour, and Manner of Life; and it is highly probable by his bringing with him 400 Men, that he came with a Purpose of Revenge, and of killing his Brother Jacob according
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to his former Resolution.—And Esau hated Jacob, because of the blessing wherewith his “Father blessed him: And Esau said in his Heart, the Days of Mourning for my Father are at Hand, then will I slay my Brother Jacob.” But those mild and humble Expressions of Jacob in stiling Esau *Lord*, and himself a *Servant*, that Message he sent by the Men who were to convey the Drove, “Behold thy Servant Jacob is behind us,” This Language I say, by which he seems to relinquish the Birthright he had purchas’d of him, did so soften even the rugged Disposition of Esau, that instead of gratifying his Revenge upon his Brother, “He ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his Neck, and kissed him and wept.”

In the 8th Chapter of Judges, the Ephraimites are introduced in high Contest with Gideon: They thought themselves flighted by *him* and their Brethren of the Tribe of Manassah, in that they had not called on
them,

S E R M O N V. 87

them, as they had on the meaner Tribes to join in the War against the Midianites. “Why hast thou served us thus, that thou calledst us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites; and didst chide with him sharply.”——Gideon by his mild and gentle Answer, allays their Heat, and he said unto them, “What have I done now in Comparison of you? is not the *gleaning* of the Grapes of Ephraim better than the *Vintage* of Abiezer.” Which Expression was an obliging Application to the Ephraimites of a Proverb, no Doubt common in those Days, whereby they were wont to magnify the smallest Action of one, as far exceeding the greatest Action of another: Is not the *gleaning* of the Grapes of Ephraim, better than the *Vintage* of Abiezer, that is, than the *Vintage* of the Family, to which I belong, for Gideon was the Son of Joash, the Abiezzite.—But Gideon goes on, “God hath deliver’d into your Hands the Princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb; and
what

what was I able to do in Comparifon of you." Then fays the Text, their Anger was abated toward him when he faid that.

Thus the Jealoufy was remov'd by giving them all the Glory they affected; what was I able to do in Comparifon with you? Whereas, had the Reply been as furly as the Interrogation; they would probably have come to a Conflict amongst themfelves, of which the Midianites might have taken the Advantage, or at leaft their overthrow would have been lefs compleat.

Samuel 1ft and Verfe 1, Old Eli, who was injudicioufly mild towards his wicked Sons, was as unreafonably fevere in his Cenfure of Hannah, when he coarfeiy and harfhly tells her, ſhe was drunk. "How long wilt thou be drunken, put away thy Wine from thee." She *might* have replied, that he greatly wrong'd her, and that it did not become the Sanctity of his Age and Character,

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Character, to pass so rash and so cruel a Judgment upon her Behaviour, but she chooses rather to answer, “Not so my Lord, I am a Woman of a sorrowful Spirit, I have drunk neither Wine nor strong Drink, but have poured out my Soul before the Lord; count not thine Hand-maid for a Daughter of Belial, 15. 1. Upon this modest Answer the Prophet saw his Mistake, and in Recompence for his Rebuke gives her now his Blessing, go in Peace, and the God of Israel grant thee thy Petition,” verse 17.

The violent and splenetic Temper of Saul, his ungovernable Passion, his Fierceness; appear from many Passages of his unfortunate Life, but no where more strongly than where he has any Intercourse with David.—His rooted Averfion, his unremitted Endeavours to work his Ruin are evident from his *secret* Machinations to circumvent him, and from his *open* pursuit of him; and yet this harsh and untractable Disposition is surprizingly

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wrought upon by the mild and humble Carriage of David.—When David had cut off the Skirt of his Garment, and by that instance of forbearance, had testified his glorious Generosity and his Fidelity to him, he styles him my Lord and my Father, the Lord's anointed, the King of Israel, in Comparison of whom he himself was but as a dead Dog.—It is said this did immediately melt the obdurate Heart of Saul, that he lift up his Voice and wept.—That Heart which panted for Blood and Slaughter, is now so effectually wrought upon by this Mildness, as to burst forth into Tears of Kindness and Pity; and now he returns him a gentle Answer, “Is it *thy* Voice my Son David?” Just before he had persecuted him as his greatest Enemy, even now he acknowledges him for his Son, and commits to him (as if he were his dearest Friend) the Care of his Posterity; (verse 21) Swear now therefore unto me, that thou wilt not cut off my Seed after me, nor destroy my Name out of
my

my Father's House.—And yet David thus gentle and soothing had *his* Flights and Extravagance of Resentment also, and became in his Turn a Proof, of what the passionate Adversary owes to the Goodness of the gentle and meek.—David saw and acknowledged it in his own Case, and bless'd the happy Instrument that prevented his Hands from shedding Blood.—He had sworn in his Wrath to destroy Nabal and all his Family, but the Wife of Nabal with gentle Entreaties put a Stop to a Punishment, extravagantly disproportionate to the Offence; and sav'd him from committing an enormous Crime.—David recover'd from his Passion, saw how much he was indebted to his Petitioner, and cried out, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel who hath sent thee this Day to meet me, and blessed be thy Advice, and blessed be thou which hast kept me this Day from coming to shed Blood, & from avenging myself with mine own Hand.—Instead of multiplying Instances, let me rather di-

rect you to the practical Application of a Remedy, the Influence of which is so manifest.

I shall therefore now proceed to the second Point propos'd, and endeavour to account for the Prevalence of Mildness over Wrath, from the Consideration of the Passions concern'd.—We all must have observ'd that Obstinacy of Temper is increas'd by Opposition, as much as it is abated by yielding.—Thus says the Son of Sirach: He that striveth with a Man of Tongue heaps Wood upon his Fire; and again, if thou *blow* the Spark it shall burn; if thou *spit* upon it, it shall be quenched; and both these come out of the Mouth.—Words may either inflame or extinguish Anger, and of *what Sort* they should be may be better conceiv'd from the Examples I have quoted, than from any particular Rules which I could pretend to lay down: To our own Experience, to our own Observation I appeal, whether we ever saw a Man convinc'd by the Passion of his Opponent,

nent, or converted by boisterous Argumen-
 tation ; it may indeed bear down and intimi-
 date some dastardly Spirits, it may produce
 Acquiescence often, but Conviction never ;
 it may make them disguise their Aversion, but
 can never lay any Foundation for Affection,
 and I believe we must search for the Origin
 of the Effect, where most of our Inquiries
 end ; in the Vanity and Weakness of our
 Nature : Our Haughtiness will not be con-
 vinc'd by the Man that seems to despise us,
 nor can we expect that the most wholesome
 Advice should be relish'd, when the Delivery,
 argues hatred and Contempt for the Person
 we pretend to persuade.—Though we have
 Truth on our Side, tho' we are able to sup-
 port that Truth by the most irrefragable Ar-
 guments, yet if these are press'd with Scorn
 and Bitterness, their Reasonableness will not
 so much inforce, as their Virulence dispa-
 rage them ; the Spirit revolts at the usurp'd
 Authority, and the Dignity of human Na-
 ture,

ture, even in the mildest Breasts feels the Degradation.

That Meekness should have a most certain Prevalence over Wrath, will not appear at all unaccountable, when we consider what a Person under the Dominion of Anger proposes to himself: now this must be either to bring the Object of his Wrath to a Sense of what he thinks a Fault, or to take Revenge on him if he expresses no Conviction.

Now a meek Submission on the other Side is the true Way of satisfying this End; if he should be wrong in the Dispute, it argues a proper and deep Sense of the Fault and disarms Resentment; if he be in the Right and still submit, this unexpected Mildness and undeserved Gentleness of Carriage exposes highly the Weakness and Deformity of the Adversary, and must render him on cool Reflection more angry at himself—And must it not furnish real Satisfaction to our Meekness and
Charity,

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Charity, that by bearing thus with the light Offences of our Brethren against *ourselves*, we may possibly save them from much greater Offences against God, and be instrumental in delivering them from that terrible Judgment which their own Bitterness of Spirit, and Thirst after Revenge would certainly draw upon them.—Let no Man ask what Kind of *Spirit* is this? I pronounce it the Spirit of a Man and a Christian, nor should I have the smallest Suspicion of such a Spirit, in the most critical and perilous Situation of a just Battle.

Before I dismiss this Subject entirely, I must observe that there are two Questions worth our Consideration, First, how this Doctrine may consist with the Imprecations that occur in the Psalms, and Secondly how it is reconcileable with the Doctrine of Reproof, which according to the Scriptures ought sometimes to be urg'd with Severity.

And First, as to the Curses and Imprecations that are frequent in the Psalms, such as
let

let all mine Enemies be ashamed and forevexed; let them be taken in their Devices; let them be confounded and put to Shame; and now that he lieth, let him rise up no more. Again, let Death come upon them, and let them go down quick into Hell.

All Persons skill'd in the Language allow, that the Hebrew Verbs in the Passages above cited, may be render'd with as much grammatical Justice in the future Tense; as in the imperative Mood; nor is there in any one of these Places an Expression that imports any Wish or Desire; whence they appear to be rather Predictions than Prayer; they rather tell us what *shall* come to pass, than what the Writer desires *should* be inflicted on them; this Construction also agrees well with the Psalmists Manner of Speech elsewhere.—He tells us that the ungodly shall not stand in Judgment, that their Way shall perish; that his Enemies shall fall, and that all the Works of Iniquity shall be scatter'd.—In these Passages

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sages our Interpreters have kept to the future; the Question is, had they the same Reason to have done it elsewhere.—In the following Words they certainly had, let his Days be few, and let another take his Office.—They might as well have render'd them, his Days shall be few and another shall take his Office, *for* this contains a Prediction of the Fate of Judas, since St. Peter mentions this Scripture as a Prophecy, not as a Prayer: He tells us that this Scripture must needs be fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the Mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, and if this be so, no Man can blame the Psalmist for denouncing Evil against Evil Men; no more than he can blame the Prophets, for prophesying Evil against the greatest Sinners.

The wishing of Evil directly to any under the Notion of Evil, must needs be malicious and unlawful; but the wishing of such Kinds of temporal or temporary Evils, as tend to

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the Prevention of greater and more lasting ones, by Way of Correction and in Vindication of Divine Justice, is not Contradictory to the Rules of Charity.—Of this Nature was that Petition, “Fill their Faces with Shame, O Lord, that they may seek thy Name.”—This is not to pray *against* them, but for them: After all, if we consider these Passages singly, we shall not find their Import, such as might be suppos’d at first Sight: That our Enemies should be ashamed and confounded, that their Way should be dark and slippery, comes simply to this, that they may be disappointed in their evil Attempts. The best Orientalists assert, that some Passages sound harsh, and appear very severe in our Version, which do not so in the Original.—Take one Instance, “Let Death come hastily upon them, let them go down quick into Hell;” Here they say the Word we render Hell, commonly signifies no more than the Grave or Place of the Dead; and that he who considers the Hebrew Text, can
infer

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infer no more than this, that the Psalmist predicts the sudden Death of Men, in whose Dwelling is Wickedness.

Again, it is very evident from the Character of the Psalmist, and from other Parts of the Psalms, that he was far remov'd from that Acrimony and Spirit of Revenge suppos'd in the Objection drawn from these severe Passages in those Writings. "O Lord my God, if I have done this; if there be Iniquity in my Hands; if I have rewarded evil to him that is at Peace with me, yea I have deliver'd *him* that without Cause was my Enemy;" Again they rewarded me Evil for Good, to the spoiling of my Soul.— But as for me when *they* were sick, *my* clothing was Sack-cloth: I humbled my Soul with Fasting and my Prayer returned into mine own Bosom.—I behaved myself as tho' he had been my Friend or my Brother, I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his Mother. The Psalmist elsewhere

tells how he was affected as to his Enemy. It was not an Enemy that reproached me, for then I could have born it.—He might justly say so: He did with singular Meekness bear the Reproaches and Curses of *Shimei*, and the causeless Persecutions of Saul, without rendering Evil for Evil, or Railing for Railing: It is not then very credible, that he should violently and intentionally curse his Enemies in his *Prayers and solemn Devotions*.

But it may be ask'd again, how this Doctrine of soft Words may consist with the Duty of Reproof which ought sometimes to be given with Severity, "Rebuke them sharply." May not a Man by his Silence and Lenity be Partaker with others in their Offences; and either really consent, or seem to do so to the Sins of others? We can all conceive a Judge upon a human Tribunal, endued with all the tender Sensibility of Nature refin'd by Christian Meekness; yet
delivering

delivering the most awful Sentence of the Law.—We can conceive the same Man on Occasions of less Importance, rebuking severely in his Office, yet without personal Acrimony.—It is so obvious to transfer this reasoning from civil Society, to Morals and Christianity, that to dwell upon it would be an Insult to your Understanding; I therefore hasten to the Application.—And First, I must remark that if mild and gentle Words have such Prevalence beyond such as are wrathful and harsh, then mild and gentle Actions must be so likewise: Words being of no other Force, than as they denote our inward Thoughts, or express our Action or Intention of acting.—We read in Hosea, of the Bands of a Man, and the Cords of Love, implying that to such as have not put off human Nature, and its feelings, there can be no such powerful Obligation as that of Kindness.—I shall in the Second Place, take Occasion to point out the Lawfulness, and Fitness of giving to Men the Reverence
and

and Honor due to their Titles, and belonging to their Stations; in Opposition to those melancholy Spirits, who place so much of Religion in being what the World not unjustly calls unmannerly; this is not agreeable either to the Light of Nature, or the Precepts and Practice of Scripture: If we argue from Nature we find in the World different Ranks; it is therefore the Will of God.—If we argue from Scripture the Apostle exhorts, that we should render to all their Due, Fear to whom Fear, Honor, to whom Honor is due, and by St. Peter we are enjoin'd to honor all Men, that is to give to every Man that due Reverence, both in our demeanour and Words, that belongs to his Abilities and Station.—The Appellations of Lord and Father, are frequently us'd in the old Testament, by Way of Civility and Respect to those of a superior Condition.—St. Luke also uses the Title of most excellent Theophilus.

When

When St. Paul was to speak publickly for himself before a civil Judicature, he does with all imaginable Softness of Address, conciliate to himself the good Opinion of his Judges, by acknowledging his Happiness in pleading before a Person, so Learned and expert in all the Questions among the Jews, as King Agrippa was; and afterwards when he was interrupted in his Speech by Festus, and told that he was mad, he makes the most submissive Reply: I am not mad *most noble* Festus.

As for the Objection taken from the 13th of Matthew, call no Man Father upon Earth neither be ye called Masters, this cannot refer to those Titles of Respect which concern Natural or civil Relations because the Words were afterwards frequently us'd by the Apostles in this Sense, but must refer to that Signification of the Words, wherein they were given to the leading Men of the Pharisees, who expected that *their* Dictates and Traditions

Traditions should be receiv'd without Examination or Dispute, as if they had a masterly or fatherly Power over the Faith of Men; and in *this* Sense, God only is our Master and Father.

To conclude, Acquiescence and Submission in our Language and Manner, as far as Truth and Generosity of Spirit will allow, is an Argument of our Prudence; it is as profitable to Society, as it is acceptable to God, as it engages and captivates the Hearts of Men, and as it consequently contributes to our own Honor, Quiet and Safety.

It is an Argument of the Politeness of our Education, for none but Spirits unreclaim'd by civil Converse, vent themselves in rough and boisterous Language.

But is not only an Argument of Prudence and Politeness, but of magnanimity; the greatest Man is never more Triumphant than
when

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when he overcomes Infolence with Humility,
and Wrath with Meeknefs.

Let us then my Brethren watch carefully the first Steps towards Intemperance of Speech, for as Language is the Comfort and Blifs of Society, fo we have found by Experience, that it may be made the Bane of it.—Language is generally firft violated by what we too gently call the Imagination and Warmth of Youth; it is by Degrees prostituted to all the Bafenefs and Villanies that Words can be forc'd to submit to; it is tortur'd to ferve the Purpofes of Falfehood, to the Deftruction of the good Name of others; and when it has blafted all that is worthy and Innocent below; it tranfcends the Limit of this Earth, and affaults even that Divinity to whom alone the good and Innocent Appeal from Scandal and abufe. But thou God of all Patience, fet Watch before our Mouths, and keep the Door of our Lips.—Amen, &c.

P

SERMON VI.



S E R M O N VI.

JOHN XIV. Chap. and part of 22d Verse.

*Lord! how is it, that thou wilt manifest
thyself unto us and not unto the World.*

SO long as the Principles of human Nature continue the same, so long will there prevail in the World, Misconstruction and Misrepresentation: The Love of Novelty, that most active Principle of our Constitution, and the vain Affectation of Singularity; are the inexhaustible tho' turbid Springs which overflow without enriching the intellectual World.—Hence the Variety of Opinions of subtle Distinctions, and of fine spun Arguments, both in Morality and Theology; broach'd and retail'd to the World by Men, who consider the Suggestions of a warm and fanciful Imagination, as

a sufficient Warrant for uttering Doctrines of the most dangerous Tendency.—From such Enemies, the most simple Truths are in the greatest Danger of Assault, since without subtile Refinement, no Ground for Argument is afforded, and all Opportunity of Praise due to superior Abilities and Ingenuity is precluded.—As the Christian Doctrine is beyond Doubt one of the most simple Truths which can be propos'd to Man, so accordingly it has suffer'd most by misapplied Sagacity, by wilful Misconstruction and deliberate Misrepresentation.—This is obvious to every one who looks Abroad into the World, and there observes the astonishing Variety of Branches, which have been grafted upon the simple Stock of Christianity. To get rid of the mental Confusion that must ensue from attending to such numerous, and almost opposite Claims to his Assent; it is the Duty of every Professor of the Religion of Christ; to read, digest, and compare these holy Writings, which contain the genuine

Records of his Faith ; and by such a serious Investigation, he will assuredly attain to the Satisfaction that results from a Conviction of the uniform Simplicity of the divine Dispensations ; and be himself enabled to furnish a Reply, to the animated Interrogation of the Apostle in the Text : Lord, how is it thou wilt manifest thyself to us, and not unto the World ? As it may be perhaps an Advantage to the Younger Part of my Audience, to assist them in this important Enquiry.—I shall Endeavour to exhibit to them a summary View of the divine Dispensations and point out the Harmony and Connexion of the separate Parts, so as to enable them to answer the most general and popular Objections of Unbelievers ; this may tend to lead them to a more comprehensive View of the whole of the Christian Scheme ; and establish Principles of Faith and Virtue, which cannot fail to operate to the Advancement of true Religion and Piety.

The

S E R M O N VI. 109

The Object of the present Discourse therefore shall be, first to lay before you a Sketch of the several Dispensations of God in the different Ages of the World; preparatory to a proper Enquiry in the second Place, into the Objections of Unbelievers with regard to the Manner, Time, and Effects of the divine Manifestations.

Let us then take our View from the Infancy of the World: The divine Manifestations were coeval with the Creation: Adam when he first came from the forming Hand of his Maker, was impress'd with evident Marks of the divine Image: His rational Faculties were strong and lively, the Communion he had with the Deity, could not fail to enlighten his Mind, and raise it to the Adoration of the first Cause; the Author of his Existence and all the Blessings he enjoy'd?—But this Scene of Innocence and Happiness was soon chang'd: By Disobedience he fell, and by that fall the original
Constitution

Constitution of Nature was impair'd and a fatal Door was open'd to Sin, Misery, and Death.—Yet in this dismal State he was not utterly forsaken, the watchful Eye of Providence was over him, the languishing Hopes of Nature were soon rekindled by the gracious Promise of a Redeemer, and as a farther Support and Comfort, God was pleas'd to manifest himself to the Sons of Adam, and to direct their Conduct by some positive Institutions.—We have indeed in Scripture, but a short Sketch of the early Rudiments of reveal'd Religion, but yet enough to shew us that God never left himself without a Witness, that the first Openings of the divine Scheme, were Anticipations of the future Kingdom of the Messiah.—After the Flood, the Face of earthly Things was chang'd, there was as it were, a new Creation: But Religion still wore the same heavenly Aspect, the same beautiful Lineaments of moral Duty; the remarkable prophecy of Lamech was now fulfill'd: God
established

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established his Covenant with Noah, the Curse was taken off the Ground, and the temporal Blessings were restored, as an Earnest and Pledge of better Things to follow.

Nature was never touch'd with nicer Delicacy, than in the History of the Patriarchs, the whole is related with a beautiful Simplicity, and with the most solemn Air of Truth, as well as Antiquity; the Vices and Imperfections, as well as the Virtues of these eminent Worthies, are displayed in their full Light, without the least Indication of partial Attachment.—In their whole Character and Conduct, the divine Providence interposes, directs their Counsels and goes with them as their constant Guide, in the long Journey of their Lives.—As Mankind increas'd, so the divine Manifestations multiplied; the Scheme unfolded gradually by Dreams, Visions, Prophecies, and the Appearance of Angels.—When we find these good and holy Men walking with God,
entering

entering into Covenant with him, supporting the Honor and Dignity of human Nature, erecting Altars for the Worship of the true God, disclaiming the Practice of Idolatry, and spreading the Knowledge of Religion far and wide.—These illustrious Proofs of Faith and Righteousness demand our Reverence, and ought to fill us with every Sentiment of Love, Piety and Admiration : But the most striking Circumstance, is that divine Spirit of Prophecy, which enlighten'd their Minds, and enabled them to see the Promises afar off.—Abraham tho' at a distance, rejoic'd to see the Day of Christ, and he saw it and was glad.—Neither was the last Scene of Jacob's Life attended with less remarkable Distinctions.—At that awful Moment he summon'd his Children together, sketch'd out the Characters and Fortunes of all the Tribes, and limited the Descent of the blessed Seed to that of Judah.—To Judah he consign'd the spiritual Blessing and with what a divine Glow of Inspiration did he

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he add, that the Sceptre should not depart from Judah, nor a Law giver from between his Feet, until Shiloh come! The Communications relating to the Messiah were the grand Point and always first in View.—The Plan is carried on with Unity of Design, and gathers Strength by Time.

If we advance forward to the Legation of Moses, we shall find the same Harmony of Intention, shining thro' all its Parts, though sometimes clouded and obscur'd by the thick Veil of Rites and Ceremonies. Even these ritual Observances were adapted to the Genius of the Jews, and were happily made choice of as a Guard against the idolatrous Customs of the Heathens: Many of them were significant Types of the Messiah, and as such are with great propriety stil'd by the Apostle, the Shadows and Figures of good Things to come.

With Respect to the prior Revelations
Q of

of God, many of the Patriarchal Ordinances still retain'd their Force; and with Respect to the future Kingdom of the Messiah, was not the whole Frame and Constitution of the Law of Moses; a wise Institution, leading us by the Hand, to the spiritual Blessing of the Gospel? Between the Founders of both Covenants, what strong Lines of Resemblance appear, and in what a variety of Instances, have the Similitude between Moses and Christ; been trac'd both by ancient and modern Writers.

Such Resemblances evidently bear upon them, the Stamp of divine Providence.— In the whole Texture of reveal'd Religion there is an even and regular Consistence; many of the patriarchal Prophecies had their Completion under the Law; and many of the Jewish Predictions were fulfill'd under the Gospel.—The nearer the Prophets come to the Kingdom of the Messiah, the more the sacred Fire kindles in their Breasts.—

Lo!

S E R M O N VI. 115

Lo! this is our God says the Prophet, we have waited for him and he will save us, this is the Lord, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his Salvation! the *Reduplication* denotes the greatest vehemence of Desire and Expectation, and carries in it the most elegant Propriety.——We come now as by easy Steps to the everlasting Gospel of Christ, the End, the Glory, and Perfection of all: The Law was given by Moses, but Grace and Truth came by Jesus Christ, now the Sacrifice and the Oblation cease; they give way to a better Covenant, establish'd upon better Promises.——The Veil of the Temple is rent, the Partition Wall is taken down, the Gentiles are called in, the Poor have the Gospel preach'd unto them; that pure and heavenly Gospel, which strengthens the Ties of Nature, sweetens the Affections, inspires every virtuous Sentiment, and recommends every Principle of Godliness and Honesty, which can adorn, refine, or dignify human Nature.——It is

enforc'd by all the Motives, which can induce a rational Creature to receive it, and supported by all the Evidences of Truth, which can stamp Conviction upon impartial and unprejudic'd Minds.—This brief Review of the several Dispensations of God, tho' given at fundry Times, and in divers Manners, is sufficient to shew the wonderful Harmony and Connexion of reveal'd Religion, in all its different Branches.—Consider the several Systems apart, without any Dependence one upon another, and like the loose Materials of a Building, they may seem in the Eyes of some, to discover no Marks of Beauty, Wisdom, or Proportion; but place them in their just Combinations, and they will appear in a higher Point of View; as worthy of God, the supreme Architect of all things, grand in Design, and perfect in Execution.

These Considerations open the Way in the second Place, to enquire into the Objections of Unbelievers, with regard to the
Manner,

S E R M O N VI. 117

Manner, Time, and Effects of the divine Manifestations.

The manner of the divine Manifestations, is what gives great Offence to the Enemies of reveal'd Religion.—They ask, why has God manifested his Will in such different Ways, and such unequal Proportions; is he not the universal Parent! why then reveal himself grudgingly little by little, as express'd by a certain Author.

But does it become Man to prescribe Laws to his Maker? Who has known the Mind of the Lord, or who has been his Counsellor! his Judgments are a great Deep.—Again they say, he is no respecter of Persons, and he cannot act inconsistently with his moral Perfection. But is the granting a Revelation, a claim of Right in Man, or an Act of pure Mercy in God? Surely he may communicate his Will to whom, and in what manner best Suits his Wisdom.—

There

There might be some Weight in their Arguments, if all Mankind were to be judg'd by the same Standard, if they that gather'd much, and they that gather'd little, if they who had the Means of Grace, vouchsaf'd unto them, and they who sat unavoidably in Darknefs, were equally accountable to the great Judge, without any regard to their Opportunities: But God is not a hard and unreasonable Master: We are assur'd that they who are without Law, shall be judg'd without Law.

The strictest Notions we can form of Justice, do not imply that all Men shall enjoy the same Talents, but that all shall be rewarded, or punish'd, according to the Application or Abuse of those Gifts, which are committed to them.—No Man has a right to challenge that to himself, which is the free and unmerited Gift of God: St. Paul says, hath not the Potter, power over the Clay, to make one Vessel unto Honor, and
another

another unto dishonor? The least Mercies are greater than we deserve, and to appropriate to ourselves an equal Proportion of divine Favor, as a matter of Justice is the height of Arrogance and Presumption; it bears hard against natural as well as reveal'd Religion, and tends to unhinge the whole Constitution of Providence.

But the Justice and Benignity of God is not all that is challeng'd by such Objectors, his Wisdom also is call'd in Question; they ask why were the Israelites, a poor, mean, and contemptible Race, in a little Corner of the World, made Choice of, above all others.—May not the Question be retorted, why might not the sacred deposit be entrusted to the Jews, as well as to any other People. The Reason given by Moses, ought to have its Weight, God chose their Seed, because he lov'd their Fathers; the divine Promise was made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.—Had the Blessing centred in any other Families

milies upon Earth, the outcry of Unbelievers would certainly have been greater. But waving this Argument, which perhaps they may call begging the Question, They tell us that the Jews were a little inconsiderable People, ignorant and barbarous.—It is true, in outward Splendor, they were inferior to some of the neighbouring Nations; and perhaps in Arts and Science not so eminently distinguish'd, or as it is express'd by a certain Writer, they had not arriv'd at the Manhood of Philosophy; but the more seemingly insignificant the Instruments of Providence, the more Room for Admiration, and the less for Imposture.—It is urg'd that the Jews were a perverse and stiff neck'd People, ever revolting from the Laws of God; compare them with other Nations? were they more so than others, or nearly so much immers'd in Polytheism and Idolatry? tho' it was indeed their frequent, and unjustifiable cry: Let us go down into Egypt, yet the Worship of the true God
was

S E R M O N VI. 121

was never totally lost amongst them; their Revoltings were never universal, and never of any lasting Continuance.—We are told that they were shut up in a little corner of the Earth, and therefore not well adapted to propagate the divine Oracles thro' the World: They were on the contrary situated in the Centre of the known World, between Egypt and Arabia on one Hand, Syria, Chaldea and Affyria on the other, in the Neighbourhood of Tyre and Sedon, the great Emporiums of the commercial World: It is objected lastly that the Jews were a sequester'd Race, secluded from the rest of Mankind; tho' it evidently appears they were eagerly desirous of admitting Proselytes; since in the time of Solomon, these amounted to no less than 153,000 and 600.

But not only the Manner of the divine Manifestation, is the Subject of cavil, but the time—they say if the Gospel was a System of Religion, so beneficial to Mankind,

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why was it so long delay'd as to the Reign of Tiberius?—Let us wave the obvious Reply; does Man know the Times and Seasons, better than his allwise Creator? And tho' it is natural to remark, that had Christ made an earlier Appearance in the World, the Harmony of the divine Œconomy had been disturb'd, the Predictions of the Prophets must have pass'd away without their Accomplishment, especially those relating to the Messiah: The Jewish republic was not as yet dissolv'd, the Sceptre had not departed from Judah. Yet without a reference to the prior Administrations of Providence, we may justly observe that there was at that Juncture a peculiar Fitness, even to our Apprehensions, in the coming of our Lord.—The World was prepar'd for this great Event: Not only the Jews, but the Romans, and many of the eastern Nations, entertaining lively Hopes, and foreboding Expectation of some great Deliverer.

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At this time the Jews by their formalities had almost lost sight of moral Obligations, through the ritual Observances of the Law; and among one Sect of them, the Doctrine of a future State, (the grand Support of all Religion) was generally exploded.—Nor did the Heathens stand in less need of divine Instruction, their Idolatry and Superstition, had thrown the thickest Veil over the best directing Principles of human Nature.

At this time the Gospel met with a happy Coincidence of Circumstances, such as no other Period could perhaps have furnish'd. Suppose it granted in the early Ages of the World.—A written Revelation before the use of Letters? Date its Origin a little lower in the most flourishing State of Egypt.—What bad Repositories must Egyptian Hieroglyphics have been for the sacred Oracles of an *invisible* Being.—It may be said perhaps that the most flourishing Times of

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the Grecian Empire would have been better adapted to this divine Purpose.—But would the Pride of Greece have stoop'd to the humble Doctrines of the Cross, without a constant Miracle; is it probable that they would have condescended to any Wisdom but their own.—Had the early Times of the *Roman* Empire been made the Vehicles of divine Knowledge, insuperable Obstacles occur, a Nation devoted to Arms, and carried away by a Thirst of Glory and Conquest, would certainly have rejected the Gospel of Peace.—But at the Juncture when our Saviour enter'd upon his Ministry, many natural Causes conspir'd to give it due Effect.

An Elegance of Taste and Refinement of Manners had taken Place in Rome.—The *Learning* of this Age, was indeed at first an Obstacle to its Success, but as soon as it condescended to an impartial Scrutiny, it no longer

longer resisted the force and power of Truth, but became its most powerful Advocate.— The Sweets of Peace were now enjoy'd both in Europe, and Asia, the new Religion, instead of being lost in the Din of Arms found Men at leisure to make a free Enquiry into its Doctrines, and the Success was in just Proportion.

But the Objections of Unbelievers are not confin'd to the Manner and the Time of the Dispensation, but they contend, (one Writer at least does) that in its Effects, it is productive of more Harm than Good; he says, what in most Places passes for the Christian Religion, has transform'd this social, benign Creature, into one fierce & cruel; and made him act with such rage and fury against those who never did, nor design'd him any Injury, as could not have enter'd into the Hearts of Men to conceive, even tho' they were in the most abject State of Degeneracy and Corruption. Do we hear this of the Religion of Christ?

Cruelty

Cruelty laid to the Charge of Christianity ! the Malice of Man could not have invented a greater Scandal, nor a more unfounded one ; we may as well suppose the great destroyer of Mankind a pure Spirit of unmix'd Benevolence.—If Christians and Heathens are to be compar'd together, we may argue either from Principles or Facts ; if from the former, the Christian has not only the same instinctive Impressions of Humanity, but the tender Feelings of Nature are render'd more pure, more benign and gentle, by the sweet Influence of the Gospel ; the true Wisdom from above first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of Mercy and good Fruits.—If we argue from Facts, they should be stated fairly ; the vilest Actions of nominal Christians, the horrid Fruits of Superstition, are not to be set in Competition, with the most illustrious Acts of Heathens.—But to form a true Rule of Judgment, we must distinguish between the nominal and *real* Christian, between the
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true and sincere Followers of Christ, and the Corrupters of his Word and Doctrine.—It must be own'd that the sacred Name of Christ has been often made the Cloak of Superstition or Malice ; many have been hurried on by a fiery Zeal, to think that they did God Service, by trampling on the Laws of Humanity ; of the Truth of this the sanguinary Practices of superstitious Zealots, will always remain an undeniable Testimony: But does the Fault lie in the Religion of Christ, or in the Perverſion of it? the best Things are capable of Abuse, and the Luſts and Paſſions of Men will ſometimes bear the Sway ; but let Chriſtianity have its due Influence, and all its Productions will be ſweet and amiable : Mercy and Truth will meet together : Righteouſneſs and Peace will kiſs each other.

Thus have I endeavour'd to execute what I propos'd in this Diſcourſe, to mark the Progrefſion of God's Revelations, and to
answer

answer the Objections of those who pretend not to believe them : I shall not now detain you with the Application of *our* valuable Persuasion of the Truth, to the several duties of Life, but submit this important Business to your private Meditations.

Nor is it possible that you can pursue this serious, this momentous Subject, without the grateful and animated Expostulation of the Apostle, Lord ! how is it, that thou wilt manifest thyself unto *us*, and not unto the World ?

SERMON VII.



S E R M O N VII.

ACTS XVII. Chap. and 21st Verse.

For all the Athenians and Strangers which were there, spent their Time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new Thing.

THERE is nothing which occurs in History more memorable or important, than the short, clear and elegant Narration, in which the bold and steady Confidence of St. Paul is deliver'd, in the Propagation of our Religion.—We see this strenuous Assertor of Truth at one Time engag'd with Barbarians, at others in eager Dispute with the Jews and Greeks.—Nor is it surprising that his active and industrious Efforts met with such vigorous Opposition, when the Terms of the Contest were so unfavourable:

able: On the *one* hand Obstinacy and Dulness of Apprehension, presented an insurmountable Bar; on the *other*, Subtilty of Argument, and an Appearance of Wisdom, tho' false, yet winning and seducing. Some refus'd to his Eloquence and patient Hearing; some by wilful Misconstruction render'd it unintelligible to others, and even to themselves.

Being call'd to Trial, this bold and skilful Orator pleaded his Cause with Weight and Solemnity.—Anxious for the Support of Truth alone, and supported by upright Conviction, he rested his Cause upon its own Merit, nor did he demand from the Council of Arcopagus, any Countenance or Protection, but what the Dignity and solemn Character of their Office requir'd.—That Tribunal was always esteem'd by the Athenians of the utmost Purity and Importance, nor was any Man thought to be qualified for a Seat on that respectable Bench; but those
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whose Prudence and unfullied Integrity had stood the Test of long and severe Trial, and receiv'd the merited Favor of the People. Such are the *competent and proper Judges*; to whose Decision the Lives and Properties of Men should ever be submitted! But however pure and unbiafs'd their Sentence might have been, where the Violation of private Rights in Society came under their Cognizance; yet in matters of Religion, their Fitness to decide, might perhaps with Justice be challeng'd, and for this Reason; it was Customary at Athens indiscriminately to admit the Worship of the Gods of any Nation whatsoever, and to allow them Temples and Altars in their City; only reserving the Ceremonies of their own *establish'd Religion*, constant and unchang'd: As their Religion suppos'd a Multitude of Gods, so they readily admitted that there was Room for more, and allow'd that particular Worship might be paid to external Deities, without interfering with that due to their own;

hence that Multitude of Temples which gave St. Paul so great Offence, rais'd to Deities without Existence, to the Reproach of those who erected them; hence that Altar to the *unknown* God, from which the Sagacity of St. Paul deduc'd those Arguments for the Support of Truth, and the Subversion of the Errors of Superstition.

It is natural here to demand why Men rather *excessive* than Sparing in Matters of Religion so obstinately combated the *Christian* Religion; why those who greedily receiv'd all foreign Ceremonies and Rites, should rancorously oppose the Introduction of this *one* Religion only.

We are led in Answer to this, to look into the Nature of all idolatrous Worship; and we may observe that however distinct the different Species may be, yet they are far from being Contradictory to each other, nay scarcely interfere: This is sufficiently
manifest

manifest from a Review of ancient Polytheism; hence it was, no one thought the Worship paid to another's Deity, detracted from that due to his own: Temples were erected every Day, and Altars consecrated to all the Gods, Greek or Barbarian; to the Living and to the Dead; to the known and to the unknown; and all constructed with Magnificence, render'd the City, a Scene of Ornament and Elegance.

To acknowledge *one* and *one only* God, by which they must effectually have overturn'd all their Ceremonious Worship, in such a City of Parade and elegant Refinement was not to be expected, nor would the Magistrates who had the Care of the establish'd Religion, readily agree to it. Hence in Matters of Religion the Search after Truth was never seriously pursued; they would gladly indulge their natural Spirit of Curiosity; they would freely listen to the Author of a new Opinion, to which no one would

would dare to give his Assent, tho' unable to controvert it; neither Accusers nor Judges of suppos'd Innovators in Religion, were much concern'd for Truth; they wish'd only for something new and unheard of: For "all the Athenians and Strangers which were there, spent their Time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new Thing."

It may justly be question'd whether this ardent thirst of Novelty which is objected to the Athenians, be productive of more Evil or Good to Men.—This active Principle, seems to be implanted in our Nature by the great Author of our Being, to instigate us to an inquisitive Search after Truth; it accompanies us thro' every stage of Life; the Child who breaks his Toy to discover the internal Arrangement, and the Philosopher who freezes under the polar Circle, to Measure the Earth, are actuated by the same natural Impulse: To this Principle we owe whatever is laudable in the Investigation

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tion of Truth, to this we owe all those Arts which embellish and adorn Life, and to which all its Elegances are owing, it is the Source of all Improvement in the more abstruse Parts of Science, and to it, what is commonly call'd polite Literature, is indebted for its Dignity.—This Principle however, like all others of our Nature, if unduly regulated, is a fruitful Source of Evil.—Its powerful Efficacy in the Investigation of new Truths, is perhaps balanc'd by its dangerous Effects upon those already known and establish'd.—In all Matters which God has submitted to human Knowledge, there is a certain Point of Perfection, beyond which we cannot advance, yet the Mind of Man, particularly when endow'd with unusual Sagacity, is apt to exceed these bounds; a principle of Vanity prompts it to suppose a Degree of *Dignity* in differing from the Vulgar.—There are Men who wish rather to be conspicuous than useful, and being more anxious for Fame,
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than Utility, prefer the Appearance to the *Reality* of Wisdom; they loath Opinions on which the Authority of Time has stamp'd a Sanction, they grow tired and dissatisfied with such obsolete Knowledge, despairing of extracting Praise, from Subjects, which the Industry of their Ancestors has already exhausted; therefore when Knowledge is matur'd and Truth has acquir'd its due Stability and Credit; an Understanding which claims the Praise of superior Ingenuity, has here nothing left to recommend it to the Notice of the World but to be a conspicuous Wanderer from the beaten Track, without considering the Difficulties and Intricacies, it must encounter in its Progress, when the Clue of Reason is dropp'd.—In Societies where the Arts of civil Life, and even the Principles of Morality are rude and uncultivated, this active, nay this wanton Spirit of Curiosity, is of great Efficacy.—Emulation amongst Men engag'd in the same Pursuit may do much: What escapes the Attention

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tion or deceives the Judgment of *one* Man, may to *another* prove a Source of Information: Where *Industry* has fail'd, *Chance* has been often known to lay open the Road to Knowledge; nor can Perfection in any Art be expected, until many have labour'd with Diligence & patient Attention in its several Branches, and to this Effect the Strong, perhaps *excessive* Love of Novelty, conduces much; and in this careful and anxious Search after Truth, this Principle strongly recommends itself; the Difficulty is to restrain it at a proper Period, for if indulged with uncheck'd License, it changes its Tendency, and becomes a Source of Evil: Of the Truth of this Observation, History both Profane and Ecclesiastical, abound with Examples, and it is our Duty to profit from its Records, or History is of no more use than a mere Fable.

Amongst the laborious and inquisitive Athenians, whose Arts were the Envy of

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the World; whose Language was its Model, the nervous and pure Style of the Attic Language itself was capriciously rejected, for Feebleness without Ornament; which the Wantonness of *new Opinion*, call'd Simplicity.—Their Philosophy which Plato extended to all the Perfection of Knowledge, that could be expected from *unassisted Reason*, under his *Followers* lost all its Purity from the extravagant Vanity of those who wish'd to be conspicuous, if not by Strength of *Reason*, at least by *Novelty of Doctrine*.—It would neither suit this Time or Place to discuss the shocking Extravagances of the Sects of Epicurus and Zeno, who stood in the foremost Rank of Innovation: The former, the Champion of Vice and Immorality, refer'd every Thing to Pleasure, and that of the grossest kind; the latter indeed prais'd Virtue, but of that ungente Sort, that to admire it, we must lay aside our Reason and our Humanity together: What an astonishing Effect of the
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Love of Novelty, that Men should arrange themselves under the Banners of those Leaders, of whom the one annihilated all Virtue; the other betray'd it by a weak defence.

Tho' oblig'd by Candour, I unwillingly call your Attention to more modern Times in pursuit of this Argument; and am ashamed to say, what Infamy has accrued to our Religion, from the arrogant Vanity of those, whose Love of Novelty has hurried them beyond the Bounds of Prudence, Moderation, and Decency.—Nor can it be denied that something of this Sort existed in the earliest and best Times of the Church. The Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians proves that on this Head, even at that early Period they were reprehensible, and we find him accordingly recommending to them Unity of Opinion, in the most earnest Terms.

We collect from the Tenor of his Epistles, that many were dissatisfied with the

Simplicity of the Christian Faith which from this Quality of its Doctrine, precluded all Possibility of being conspicuous, unless by engrafting on it, some Singularity of Opinion: We find them accordingly, mixing the Philosophy of the Times with the Purity of Religion, and bartering their Integrity and their Conviction, for the paltry Applause of a few misguided Followers; they divided the Apostolical Church, into a Diversity of Sects, which the Intreaties, Arguments and Authority of St. Paul, were not able to re-unite.

This Introduction of the Philosophy of the Times, is evidently pointed at by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Colossians, in which he thus exhorts them, “ Beware lest any Man spoil you thro’ Philosophy and vain Deceit, after the Tradition of *Men*, after the Rudiments of the World, not after CHRIST.—Yet this Spirit never slacken’d, the power of Vanity was too prevalent, and
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the early and later Ages of the Church have severely felt its Influence; the Weakness of the *Ebionites*, the Subtlety of the *Gnostics*, the Sensuality of *the Cerinthians*, harrafs'd the evangelical Truth with Doctrines that offer Violence to Reason, vouch'd by a Conduct that according to the Accounts transmitted to us of the Impurities of some of these Sectaries, is in many Instances a disgrace to Humanity.

If such were the Deviations from the Truth in the Days of the Apostles themselves, what was to be expected at future Periods? Even what History and Experience have furnish'd: Vanity and mental Licentiousness, have boldly advanc'd Doctrines, and even Articles of Faith, unauthoriz'd by Christ & not acknowledged by his Apostles.

There is no Man ignorant of the present numberless Divisions of the Church, and few but have heard of the more early and vehement

ment Heresies, to discuss which would be now unnecessary, and to recite their Names unprofitable: Looking back to that Period of Ecclesiastical History, we see nothing but Distractions and Convulsions of the Church, so that from the Age of the Apostles to the Reign of Constantine, it suffer'd less from *External*, than from *Internal* Foes.—Even then, when it had just attain'd a little Tranquility, behold it Labouring daily with bolder Doctrines of new Opinion; behold to the Reproach of the Times, the Scandalous Contention between Alexander and Arius.—The latter Scrutinizing the most sacred Mystery of our Religion, by the evasive Subtilties of Metaphysics; the other, seeking Philosophical Supports for supernatural Truths.—Truths, above human Comprehension, he examined with more Curiosity than Prudence, and claim'd the NEW Glory of philosophizing, where Philosophy could have no Place.—Had the Question been reduc'd to the Test of Scripture,

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ture, these violent and outrageous Disputants had been silenced, but when they no longer combated for the Apostolical Opinion but their own; there were no Bounds to their abuse, no room for mutual Pardon, and neither the Persuasion of the Church, nor the Authority of the Emperor, were able to reconcile their Animosity.

I pass over the numberless Controversies, the Origins of which were as ridiculous as their Events ruinous; the Character given by Tacitus of Christians in general, took rise from the Impurities of the Sectaries, and the whole Body suffer'd under their Reproach.——It is dreadful to recollect the shocking Monuments of Folly and Barbarity, which for near 14 Ages are afforded by the History of Church, Friends and Foes united to distract it, on the one Side by Ignorance and Error, on the other, by Superstition and Fraud, and on all Quarters by the dangerous Affectation of Novelty.—

Look

Look to the History of the Popes, and mark the Innovations which each succeeding Pontiff introduc'd or substituted in the cumbersome List of the Ceremonies or Doctrines of his Predecessor, look to the Councils and you will find a Duty commanded by one as Orthodox, countermanded by the next, now deem'd unnecessary; again heretical; and the Authors of it anathematiz'd, and persecuted.

The Darkness of the Times, which is often advanc'd in Apology for this inconsistency of Opinion, is not at all adequate to Purpose, for I must confess, however reluctantly, that since the Revival, nay since the full Effulgence of the Light of Literature, since the happy Aera of Reformation, Opinions the most Extravagant, the most irreducible to the Light of Reason, the most dissonant to the true Harmony of the Christian Religion, have appeared, nay even in part subsist to this Day; the Evident

dent and pernicious Effects of the Love of Novelty, the Result of Vanity and Singularity, broach'd by Men who consider their own Inclination as their Warrant, to pronounce to the World, what they imagine will create an Opinion of their Sagacity, unanxious for the Conviction of Judgment. Such are the Tenets which sap the Foundation of the whole System of Laws, human and divine; removing all the Comfort of our *present* Life, and endeavouring to deride the Hopes of a *future*; and these held forth with a Boldness superior to the weak Efforts of friendly Reproof, and not to be aw'd by the Risk of worldly Reputation.

The apostolical Language is the Model of Simplicity; we find St. Paul who was confessedly the most learned amongst the Apostles, disclaiming the falacious Aid of Oratory, and refin'd Argument; he says, and I Brethren when I came to you, came not with Excellency of Speech or of Wisdom,

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declaring unto you the Testimony of God; for *I determin'd* not to know any Thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified, and my Speech and my Preaching was not with inticing Words of *Man's* Wisdom, but in Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power.—It was the true Design of their Mission, to explain the Myſteries of God to the whole World: conformable to this our eſtabliſh'd *reform'd* Religion imparts the glorious Privilege of the ſacred Volume to all Mankind.—Nor is this more agreeable to Reason than to Scripture, for St. Paul in his Epistle to the Theſſalonians, expreſſly commands to prove all Things and hold faſt that which is good; and it is univerſally allow'd and is fully evident from the 12th Verſe of the ſame 5th Chapter, that this Epistle is directly addreſs'd to the Laity.

The unadorn'd Style of the Scriptures, and the conſequent Perſpicuity of the Doctrine will riſe in certain Judgment againſt thoſe,

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those, who from whatever Motives, endeavour to pervert its Simplicity; and surely a severe Account will be requir'd by the infinite Dispenser of Genius and Wisdom, of those whose Veracity and whose Integrity falls an easy prey to their Vanity.

Look to the Facts I have here pointed out, consult Experience and you will with Pleasure make this striking Remark, that the pure and upright Stem of Christianity unwarp'd, unwaisted by the noxious Parasite Weeds of Heresy, still takes Root downwards, and will continue to flourish in the unbiass'd Judgment of all reasonable Men, so long as Truth can command Assent; so long as Simplicity shall be admired, and Virtue belov'd.

Whilst this captious License of Controversy introduces such Distraction into the religious World, *we* have particular Reason to felicitate ourselves; the Learning, the

religious Discipline within these Walls, have hitherto, and I trust will continue to supply able and faithful Assertors of the Truth.— It is the Province of all those in Power here to improve the Connexion between Religion and Letters, that the Powers of Argument may at length be employ'd to Advantage; neglecting unimportant Refinement and worldly Disputation; that the Moment of the Subject be duly weigh'd, that those who hear and learn, may bestow all their unprejudic'd Attention to the Disquisition of Truth; equally unbias'd by the Authority of ancient Prescription, or the Novelties of modern Doctrines; that Philosophy be made subervient to Religion, and not presume to hold the first Place, where its greatest Glory is to be an humble Instrument.—If you thus disappoint the Industry of those, who labour for the Corruption of Morals; your Authority will be reverenc'd by the petulant, and dreaded even by the forward and bold in Vice.



S E R M O N VIII.

PSALM CXXXIX, Verse 1 and 2.

*O Lord thou hast searched me and known me :
Thou knowest my down sitting and uprising,
thou understandest my Thoughts afar off.—
Thou compassest my Path and my lying down
and art acquainted with all my Ways.*

THE Assertion may appear singular, but perhaps will not be found unjustifiable, that in Course of Reasoning the Idea of *Providence* is antecedant even to that of a God : We are led to the Acknowledgment of his Being, by reasoning upon the Works of Nature, by perceiving Intention and Design in unconscious Animals, and inanimate Beings : We are led to the Knowledge of the Creator, both by the intelligent Parts of his Works, and by those where no Traces of Reason

Reason or even of Instinct are to be found. In rational Creatures, the deriv'd gift shews the Perfection of the giver, in the other Parts of Nature the Completion of their various Purposes without this Faculty, leads to the same Conclusion; and it is the limited Province of imperfect Faculties, to argue from Effects to Causes, in the moral as well as the physical World.—The Notion of a particular Providence is this; that the Supreme Being has a Regard to all Beings, that he has in the Government of all Events an especial Care of the Good, natural and moral of all his Creatures; that he looketh down from Heaven to behold all the Sons of Men; he fashioneth their Hearts alike, he considereth all their Works.

This Persuasion is natural to us, and a particular Providence has *generally* been believ'd in all Ages and Nations, whether more or less improv'd: A Sense of it seems to be implanted in us by the Author of Nature.

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The Readiness with which every intelligent Creature, applies in its Distress to the Fountain of all Being, is an Acknowledgment of his paternal Care, and of his Superintendence over all Individuals.—This Remark is undesignedly acknowledg'd by a late Author of Rank, whose insidious Opinions are the more dangerous, from the commendatory Garb of elegant Diction; he makes this important Concession even whilst he is endeavouring to turn the Subject into Ridicule.

The Term Providence strictly implies the fore-sight or fore-knowledge of Events, however it is generally adopted in the more comprehensive Signification I have already given and means the actual Superintendence of the Deity over his Creatures, conducting them to what is best.—This Persuasion however does not preclude human Industry. The Acts of Providence are not to be determin'd by *our* Expectations; but by the
Wisdom

Wisdom of God, directing the comprehensive System of all his Creation.

If all Mankind look up to God for temporal Interests; their Requests must clash together; and even if they did not, would it be reasonable to expect that all should be gratified? this would be to annihilate all virtuous Perseverance, to remove all Support of godly Confidence, and to check every Excursion of enraptur'd Hope, into the blissful Regions of Futurity.

If we expect Miracles to supply our Wants, we cheat ourselves with Presumptions, founded upon no Authority; if we expect no Intricacies, we forget our own Ignorance, and put ourselves in the Place of God; if we presume that we shall escape all Trials, we mistake our Religion, which is to prepare us by Acquiescence and Resignation for better Hopes.—But if we are persuaded that every Thing we do and suffer
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in our Passage thro' this Life, is under the immediate Inspection and Direction of God, we then rightly understand our Privilege and our Duty; and maintain a rational Faith which we may vindicate against every Cavil.

The Good are taught in Scripture to expect a Supply of all their Needs, they are not taught that their Needs shall be prevented, or that they are under no Necessity to look up to Heaven for a Supply.—The Distresses permitted to come upon them, teach them the Necessity and Efficacy of applying to Heaven for Relief; convince them how few are the real Wants of rational Creatures, how easily the Necessities of Nature are answer'd; how resignedly all other Wants may be borne; how vainly Happiness is to be sought after in this Life; and how miserably *they* deceive themselves, who by licentious Principles or Practices, cut off all rational Support under the Calamities of this Life.—Many useful Lessons may be

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learn'd, and therefore we may conclude many real Benefits are intended, by this providential Dispensation of such Chastisements as for the present are not joyous, but grievous: Nevertheless, if afterwards they yield the peaceable Fruits of Righteousness unto them, who are exercised thereby, they then change both their Name and Nature, and are no longer to be consider'd as Calamities, but Blessings.——They exercise the passive Virtues of good Men, and improve them in many active ones.——They teach Compassion to their fellow Sufferers, indifference to the Vanities of Life, Moderation of their Desires, restraint of their Passions and a more earnest Zeal for those Attainments, which depend not on the Changes and Chances of this mortal Life.

These Qualities from their Nature, blunt the Edge of every afflictive Incident, and often prove the means of avoiding it. However, whilst the issue of all is Safe and glorious,

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rious, whether good Men are preserv'd from Calamities ; supported under them ; rescued from their Oppression ; or *finally rewarded* for their right Application of them ; in any Case, there can be no Doubt of a particular Providence attending them.—I said that if we expect no Intricacies we forget our own Ignorance, usurping a right to Knowledge, above our Capacity, and inconsistent with our State.—Intricacies in the extensive Chain of providential Causes and Effects, there are beyond all Doubt : But the Idea of a particular Providence, does not imply an *equal* Providence, or an exact Retribution of Rewards and Punishments in this Life in punctual Proportion to merit or demerit.—Many are apt to say with Gideon, O my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us, and where be all his Miracles which our Fathers told us of ? They seem to think it implies an exact *immediate Recompence* to all the Works of Men ; and such a necessary Connexion of

Cause and Effect, as they do not now see and experience.

This Difficulty is universally taken notice of, and triumph'd in by Sceptics.—The Distinction which they expect, from a Sense of the *immediate Protection* of the Deity, does not appear; the Prosperity of the wicked and distress'd State of the Righteous are urg'd as Arguments from Fact, against the supposed continual Attention of the Creator, to the Virtues and the Interests of all his intelligent Creatures.—But besides that there is great Room for Mistake, with Respect both to the Characters and Comforts of particular Persons; whether the Appearance of Virtue be sincere, whether the Charge of Vice be not overstrain'd by malicious Censures; and what kind and degree of Satisfaction or Sorrow may redound from their outward Circumstances.—Independent of the Consideration of these Doubts, admitting the Fact, (which is not to be disputed

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puted in many Instances that there *is* an inequality of Dispensations, utterly disproportionate to the Deserts of the several Members of Society) *this* is a Proof of a particular Providence, understood in its *true* Sense, not an Objection against it.—By such a Providence we more particularly mean the constant Government of the Deity over moral Agents, as probationary Creatures, qualified and enjoin'd to improve themselves in Virtue, permitted and encouraged to prepare themselves, as Candidates for Happiness.—To such a Government an inequality of present Dispensations is even Necessary to try our Faith, to exercise our Virtue, and to shew the Force of religious Principles.—If Vengeance instantly follow'd upon Iniquity and worldly Prosperity was as certainly the consequence of dutiful Obedience, this would argue a Providence indeed; but one extending only to *this* World and leaving little Ground for Hopes in another, it would exclude
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the exercise of all passive Virtues, and yielding an *immediate* Recompence to all active ones, would close the Scene and hide all Prospect of future Reward.——But the Certainty of an after Account and State, which is prov'd by this very Inequality of present Dispensations, yields a Test to our Duty, an Encouragement to our Hope, and a convincing Proof that every Event now befalling us, and every Action now committed by us, is under constant Inspection, in order to an equitable Retribution hereafter.——It is sufficient for us that we have *here* all that is necessary for the Support of our Bodies, and the Improvement of our Minds, and this we may depend on in the Performance of our Duty.——God has nowhere promis'd to supply our Vanities, or our Wishes, but our Needs only; and of these, he that hath made us (and not we ourselves) is the best Judge.

There cannot be a greater Absurdity than
Atheism,

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Atheism, or the supposing of Effects without a Cause; and nearly if not entirely equal to this, is the Supposition that a wise and good-Being made this World, and plac'd in it moral Agents, without intending to take any farther Notice of them; that he created them with Wants, without Intention to supply them, and implanted in them Notions of right and wrong, and warm desires of Immortality and Happiness, without any Rules for the former, or well founded Hopes for the latter.

The general Laws of Providence, the Subterfuge sought by those who cannot maintain the open Field of Argument scarcely demands Enquiry or Refutation: Those who argue on this Subject confine the Deity by more than Stoical Necessity; they seem to argue that God had made Things and then put them out of his Power, or given originally such Energy to the material World, as should continue above his Influence; they
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do not allow his Interference in the Government of the World, and are oblig'd to look out for other Causes to account for the Appearances before us: they have Recourse to the familiar, but unintelligible Names of Chance, Destiny and Nature.—I am at a loss for their Meaning in the two First, and by Nature I suppose they mean a Law given by the Creator to the material Creation; but does such Law limit or exclude his own Direction and Interposition? If these stated Laws of Nature are on any Occasion broken thro', here is a Demonstration of an interposing Providence.—Those who are Eye Witnesses to Miracles have irresistible Conviction of this Doctrine, and those who receive them upon Report by unquestionable Testimony, have sufficient Evidence of them, unless all History be given up as uncertain, and past Facts are thought incapable of Confirmation; it must be admitted that there have been supernatural Interpositions; and may we not argue that if History proves
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some providential Events in *any* Method, they may and must be continued still in *some* Method.

We may however proceed another Way, and offer an Argument, which by shewing the divine Regard to the *Conclusion* of an Event, implies the Intervention of Providence in the preceding Parts of it, and the Direction and Influence of the *Means* which lead to it; this is the unanswerable evidence of Prophecies.—Every Prediction of a future Event plainly compleated, is a Testimony of the divine Prescience and Interposition.—He that can foretell Things to come, which depend on natural Causes and Effects, must have the Powers of Nature under his Command; and he that can Predict those which depend on the voluntary Actions of Men, must have the H E A R T S of Men under his Direction, and must be attentive to the Course of all necessary and free Acts, to dispose them without the Ap-
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pearance of a supernatural Interposition, to work out the Event, which had long before been predicted.—This is an Evidence easily examined and not easily evaded. We can with the least Attention see that particular Events were foretold and were actually in due Time fulfilled; nay the Prediction and Completion are often recorded, not only by different Persons, but by Persons of different Interests and Opinions.

Thus Heathens shall bear Witness to the Truth of Moses's Dispensation, and both Heathens & Jews to the Authority of Christ. Cyrus's Name and great Acts shall be foretold in *sacred* Authors, and the History of them related by *profane* ones.—The Time of the coming of the Messiah shall be punctually defined by Jewish Prophets; and the Completion of it recorded by *all* Writers.—The Scripture of the New Testament shall foretell the total and irreparable Destruction of Jerusalem, a Jew shall pen the Account
of

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of it, and an Heathen confirm it, by recording the fruitless Attempt to rebuild it.—It is difficult among the numerous Prophecies to say, which is upon the whole most clear and convincing.—But if Difficulties can be rais'd by the Arts of subtle Opposers, against the Meaning of some, and the Manner of compleating others; yet the whole Series of Prophecies from the beginning of the World to the present Time, fulfilled often by those who never heard of them, and sometimes by those who would have been glad to have defeated them; this I say amounts to a Demonstration irresistible, which a little Sense may easily discover, & much Learning cannot evade.—In Fact this will not only confirm the Truth, but contribute much to explain the Notion of Providence, when we observe in what Manner the Schemes both of good and bad Men, without influencing the Liberty or lessening the Merit or Demerit of either, are made instrumental to effect pre-determin'd Purposes.

These are Arguments drawn from Facts, which united with the others I before adduc'd are sufficient, and amount to Conviction on this Head, even for those who should not acknowledge the Authority of Scripture : But thank God we are an assembly of Christians, fully persuaded of this important Truth, on Grounds far Superior to human Argument: The sacred Volume tells us, that the Lord looketh from Heaven, he beholdeth all the Sons of Men, from the Place of his Habitation he looketh upon all the Inhabitants of the Earth ; he fashioneth their Hearts alike, he considereth all their Works.

The Acknowledgment however of this important Truth is not sufficient, it demands our Attention, our Gratitude and our Obedience.—If God attends to and protects each Individual amongst us, if every Blessing that we enjoy, in whatever Manner deriv'd to us, flows from the inexhaustible
Source

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Source of his Providence; there ought we in all our Ways to acknowledge *him*, that *he* may direct our Paths; in our Endeavours for others, we should say with the King of Israel, if the *Lord* do not help thee, how shall *I* help thee! and in our Prospects and Designs should remember with St. James, that we ought to say, if the *Lord* will, we shall live and do this or that — Our Dependence on the Deity should be sincerely intended and frequently express'd, lest we fall under that divine Malediction utter'd by Jeremiah; thus saith the Lord, *curfed be the Man that trusteth in Man, and maketh Flesh his Arm, and whose Heart departeth from the Lord.* Yet how frequently is this Guilt and this Malediction incurr'd? How numberless are the Mercies we receive, without raising our Hearts to him that sends them: How often do we enjoy the comfortable Fruits of divine Bounty, without thinking of the Cause. Let us *not* my Brethren continue in such gross neglect, let us call to recollection
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in how many Instances a gracious Providence has favour'd each of us, in our Passage thro' Life; what unforeseen Benefits have been confer'd on us; what unexpected Deliverances wrought for us from imminent Dangers; how many such Mercies do now upon this Recollection occur to us, which before for Want of such Attention, we suffer'd to pass unheeded: Has not every *real* Necessity been reliev'd in whatever Station of Life we are placed; and have not many Comforts in Proportion to our Station been added to it.—If these are not the Effects of Fate or Fortune, but the Gifts of a wise Disposer of all Events, ought they to pass thus disregarded; and shall we dwell upon our *Wants* only, which perhaps are imaginary, or if real, overballanced by Conveniences and Blessings; instrumental at least to such in *this* World, or certainly to be recompenced by greater in the next; and whilst our Attention is thus engaged, our Gratitude cannot remain inactive; the warm enthusiastic

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thusiaftic Rapture of the Pfalmift will burft fpontaneoufly from our Lips, “ Praise the Lord O my Soul, and all that is within me praise his holy Name ; praise the Lord O my Soul and forget not all his Benefits ; who forgiveth all thy Sin and healeth all thine Infirmities ; who faveth thy Life from Destruction, and crowneth thee with Mercy and loving Kindnefs.”

This Part of our Duty is its own Reward, increafes the Number and Relifh of the Bleffings confer’d on us, give us an humble, yet not lefs pleafing Senfe of our deriv’d Importance, and will make us great in the Greatnefs of our Protector, and teach us to fet a due Value upon our own Dignity, thro’ the Value and Regard our Creator *has* fhewn, and continues to fhew to us.

Laftly, the belief of a particular Providence fhould teach us Obedience to that fuperintending Power which we acknowledge ; it
fhould

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should enforce an absolute Resignation to the Inflictions, and an uniform Compliance with the Laws of the divine Dispensation: If he will supply all our Necessities, then should we cast all our Care on *him* that thus careth for *us*; and if he sees all our Steps, and marks our goings, then should we be zealous to approve ourselves to him, on whom all our present Comforts and future Hopes depend; in Distress of Circumstances this will be our Support, in Trials of our Integrity, this our Preservative, in all Dangers and Difficulties of whatever kind, this our only Refuge and Consolation; and when by Dedication of our whole Hearts and Lives to his Service, we have made our supreme Benefactor our sure Friend, we may safely say, God is our Hope and Strength, a very present Help in Trouble, therefore will we not fear, though the Earth be moved, and tho' Hills be carried into the midst of the Seas.

SERMON IX.



S E R M O N IX.

Gen. Epistle St. PETER, Chap. I. Verse 2.

Add to your Faith Virtue, and to Virtue Knowledge.

IN the Passage I have just now repeated, are contain'd two Precepts of different Tendency, but of equal Importance.—The former tends to discredit and overturn the Doctrine of Justification by Faith alone; the latter indicates that Knowledge, or Information to be attained by the Exertion of our mental Faculties, is here recommended as a powerful Aid to confirm our religious Persuasion; and a mean (as the Apostle afterwards expresses it) to make our Calling and Election sure.—This Subject is peculiarly interesting to us, not only as a Society professedly established for the Improvement and Communication of Science; but because some Writers of conspicuous Rank, both in

Society and the Republic of Letters, have ventured to assert that the Revival and Cultivation of Learning, have given a rude Shock to the Fabric of revealed Religion. What their Arguments in Support of so hardy an Assertion may amount to, I shall perhaps take a special Occasion to remark.

I shall however at present confine myself more particularly to consider the Alliance which ought always to subsist between Religion and Learning, and the Necessity of such Alliance for the true Edification of the Church of Christ.—When we take a View of the Mind of Man in its uncultivated State, unassisted by those Irradiations which should point out to him his Dependance on a Being infinitely superior to himself, and the Relations he stands in to those about him; uninstructed at the same Time, in any of those Acts and Accomplishments which furnish the Conveniences and Embellishments of Life; the Picture appears so disagreeable

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agreeable, that it would be difficult to persuade us that it bore any Resemblance to ourselves; or that a Creature so rude and imperfect could be the Work of an all-wise and powerful Creator.—Nor indeed tho' whole Nations are now to be found, who are degenerated into this State of deplorable Darkneſs, was this the Caſe of Man at the beginning, when God pronounced all his Works perfect, and gave him as the chief of all created Perfection, to be LORD over them? The intimate converſe which the Almighty condeſcended to hold with our firſt Parent, not only impreſs'd on him the ſtrongeſt Notions of religious Dependance and Subjection; but alſo as is moſt probable, and as may be collected from the ſacred Writings, furniſh'd him with every Principle of human Science, and a thorough inſight into the Works of the Creation.—It is not indeed very eaſy to apprehend wherein his Likeneſs to the divine Being ſhould conſiſt; unleſs we allow him to have been as re-

plete with all mental Perfections, as was requisite to his Rank and Station in the Universe.

Religion therefore and the Accomplishments of the Mind which pass under the general Name of Learning, were the Birth-right of Man in his pure and innocent State, and as he was privileg'd and enabled to look up to Heaven in Acts of Piety and Adoration, so he was assisted in doing it by the Knowledge he had obtain'd of the Beauty and Goodness of the Works of God on Earth.—True and genuine Science, such as was that of our general Ancestor, will always contribute to the Support and Advancement of Religion; and the religious Mind will ever be the best able to correct the Sallies, and supply the Deficiencies of human Learning.

But this high and dignified Condition of Man was of no long Continuance; the same
Deviation

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Deviation from Duty which alienated him from the Favor of God, impair'd and debilitated his rational Faculties, and the Mind was no longer the fruitful Nursery of divine and philosophical Truths, which sprung up spontaneously in it; but like the Ground which was cursed for his Sake, was soon over run with unprofitable and noxious Weeds, only to be subdued and eradicated by the utmost Labor and Care.—In the succeeding Ages of the World, the small remains of Light and Reason which were here and there scatter'd, were probably contain'd in traditional Precepts and Observations, deriv'd from the first Man, and serv'd perhaps to give some faint Directions for the Conduct of Life to those who studiously attended to them; 'till they were afterwards obscur'd by that general Irruption of Ungodliness and Folly, which ended in the almost total Destruction of Mankind.—From this View of Things, we cannot but perceive the Use and Necessity of some social Connexion

nexion and Assistance for the Support of Learning, and Religion, & the recovering in some Measure the dignity of the human Mind by instructive Discipline and regular Education. As the Powers of Doubt and Error, of Folly & Vice, have taken such strong Possession of our Natures, it is requisite that some Plan should be form'd, and some League concerted for the re-establishment of the Interests of Knowledge and Virtue.—What this Scheme for the Advancement of Religion should be, may perhaps be best determined, by examining what the Wisdom of all Ages of the Church, both under the Jewish and Christian Dispensation has thought most conducive to this Purpose; what the Success of past Attempts has been, and by what Means they have sometimes fail'd.

It must however be premis'd in this Place, that when we speak of Religion as improv'd and advanced by human Discipline, it must be meant so far only as the sacred deposit of
Revelation

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Revelation hath been preserv'd by it, in its original Purity ; true Religion by which the Will of God, and the Duties requir'd of us are plainly made known to us; never was and never could be the Invention and Work of Man, but came down as an immediate Gift from the Father of Light; the means of preserving it untarnish'd, and displaying its lustre (exclusive of the Influences of the holy Spirit upon the Soul) have been committed in a great Measure, to the ordinary Instruments of Providence, and may on that Account be consider'd as part of that mental Instruction which we receive from each other; and consequently where the most powerful Combination of Religion and Learning is, there will each of them flourish most.

The Jewish People to whom was committed the Law and the Covenant, and to whom God was pleas'd to make himself known by his especial Care and Superintendence

tendence over them as his peculiar Nation, were from their first Settlement in the Land of Promise, furnished with Seminaries for the Promotion of divine and human Knowledge.—But tho' we read of these as high as the Times of Joshua, we have no distinct Account of the Nature of their Institution, or what Regulations they were under; probably they did not for some Ages rise to any Degree of Perfection, or spread their Influence in any great Measure over the Minds and Manners of that People, from the constant Wars they were engaged in with the Remnant of the Canaanites, or the Incurfions of neighbouring Nations.—The great Æra of their complete and more solemn Establishment, seems to have been the Days of Samuel, who retiring from the Court of Saul, fix'd his Abode at Naioth; and there founded the Schools of the Prophets, and himself presided over them.—Afterwards in the time of Elijah, they were removed, or new Ones erected under his Patronage

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Patronage and Direction at Bethel and Jericho, and under those of his Successor Elifha, at Gilgal.—The Jewish Writers speak in very high Strains of these places of Learning, and particularly of the great Veneration paid to them and the Privileges they enjoy'd.

The Members they tell us were exempted from all burthenfome Offices both Civil and Military; the Seats of their Residence were held sacred, and had the Rights of the Sanctuary allow'd them.—Hence probably David chose Naioth as the safest Place of Refuge from the Persecutions of Saul; and may we not suppose, that he ow'd something more than his bare Safety to this Retreat? Might not the Genius of the royal Psalmist receive some Share of its Improvement from the Precepts of Samuel? or might it not here first catch those Flames of Piety and Devotion, which afterwards so conspicuously shone forth in his Writings! be this as it may, it is certain that one of the chief Employments

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of the Persons educated in these Seminaries, was that of composing Hymns to the Deity, and rehearsing them to Music.—They were besides instructed in the Principles of moral and natural Philosophy, in the Writings and Doctrines of Moses, and in the Jewish Polity.—Under these Institutions the State of Religion and Learning among the Hebrews was greatly improv'd, so that after the return from the Babylonish Captivity, when this Scheme was enlarg'd by Ezra, in the Erection of Synagogues, (to each of which we are told there was a Seminary annex'd) an utter End was put to that Defection to Idolatry, to which that People had been addicted, ever since their Deliverance from the Slavery of Egypt.

From Ezra there followed a Succession of Men, whom we generally find distinguished by the Title of Elders of the great Synagogue.—By the Labors of these, and by their Skill in History and Criticism, the
Canon

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Canon of the Jewish Scripture was completed.—The close of this Succession, (about 300 Years before Christ marks that Point of Time) when their Religion was best understood and practis'd, and what is worthy of Notice in Illustration of our Argument, when Learning had attain'd to its greatest Height amongst them.—By what Means they descended from these Attainments, and admitted a general Corruption of Science and Morals, cannot be consider'd with due accuracy here.—It will be sufficient for our present Purpose to observe, that by their Division into Sects and Parties, they unhappily lost Sight of that sober and edifying Discipline, which to the Benefit of their Church and Nation, had for some Time been establish'd amongst them.—By one of these Sects the Word of God was set at nought, and made of none Effect, by their Zeal for what they call'd the Tradition of the Elders, and their utter neglect of the moral Law; in the Place of which they substituted a very

rigorous Observance of the Ceremonial.—
By another the Epicurean Doctrines were
openly held and taught, and those of a Re-
surrection and a future Judgment (the great
Safeguards of Virtue) oppos'd and ridiculed.
These two grew and multiplied, and drew
the People after them, so that when our Sa-
viour came on Earth the Jewish Church was
torn in Pieces, on the one Hand by a Li-
centiousness that border'd on Atheism, and
on the other by an Hypocrisy almost as dan-
gerous to Religion as Atheism itself.—The
Appearance of the Son of God, and the Pro-
mulgation of a new Religion to the World
by him and his Apostles, is a Transaction of
Providence, in which human Science had no
Share.—It is that Boundary between the
two Œconomies of the Jewish and Christian
Churches, which rejects all the ordinary As-
sistance of Learning and Policy, and asserts
itself to be all miraculous and divine; yet it
may be observ'd of this Point of Time, that
it was highly mark'd by that People whose
conquests

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Conquests and Empire had overspread the World, for the most eminent Improvements of the Powers and Faculties of the Mind; and we may perhaps be allow'd to suppose, that for this among other Reasons, God made Choice of that Age as best prepar'd for the Reception of that inestimable Gift.—In Consequence hereof, the Gospel made its speediest and most direct Advances to the chief Fountains of that Light, which we may thus (without Violence) suppose to be kindled and diffus'd, in order to attend its Introduction into the World; as a candid Examination by the Learned was the Test, by which it ought to have been tried, and was tried.—It did not confine itself to that particular District, from whence it drew its original, till a more favorable Age of Darkness might suffer it to steal abroad undiscuss'd and unexamin'd, but was preach'd by the immediate Messengers of its Author, at Rome, Corinth and Athens; to Men who spent their Time in nothing else, but either
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to hear or tell some new Thing, some new Discovery of Reason and Philosophy; and many of them as we find in the Acts of the Apostles, ready to listen and to hear again, before they decided on any Point of Importance.—Whatever Portion of supernatural Aid might be necessary to the two or three succeeding Centuries, it is certain that even in the Apostolic Age, the Alliance began to be regularly form'd again between Religion and human Learning.

Some of the most early Converts to Christianity, and Defenders of it by their Writings, were such as had been bred up in all the Knowledge of the Gentiles, and made great Use in their Apologies, of the best Sort of heathen Philosophy.—The School of St. Mark at Alexandria, which flourished thro' the first Ages of the Gospel, supplied those Champions of the Faith, to whom the primitive Church (under God's Providence)

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ow'd the Conservation of the Purity of its Doctrines.

The Times which followed afford us a frightful Scene of the Triumphs of Ignorance and Barbarity ; from the Ruin of the Roman State, and the Incursions of the northern Nations.—In those evil Days, Religion distress'd and affrighted took Shelter in the Cloyster, but in such Company, and under such Patronage, Learning disdain'd to follow : These were the Ages in which the Bishops of Rome seiz'd the favorable Opportunity of asserting their Incroachments, and introducing the Corruptions of Christianity.—This was the long dark Night of the Church, in which the Enemy came and sow'd Tares among the Wheat, and almost destroyed all the Hopes of the Harvest.

How deplorable the Ignorance of our own Nation was during this period may be learned
from

from our own Historians, one of whom represents every Kind of Literature as laid asleep and almost Dead; and the Clergy themselves, whose Lips should have preserv'd Knowledge, are represented as unqualified to perform the ordinary Duties of their Office.——Thus it was, 'till Alfred like another Samuel arose, and gathering together the scatter'd Remnants of Learning, gave both to Science and Religion a more stable and permanent Foundation.——It was not long before the good Effects of his Establishments proclaim'd themselves to the World, for in little more than half a Century we meet with the Names of Dunstan and Athelwold, under whose Patronage Learning began to be introduced into some of the Monasteries.——The Progress of its Growth was no small Embellishment to the two or three succeeding Ages: It was not however 'till the 15th Century that it made its most successful Effort, when by a happy Combination of Circumstances, the Stores
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of ancient Science were laid open, and the Approaches to them made accessible to every common Degree of Genius and Industry.— The Light of Learning that began to spread over the Western Church by these Means, shew'd the Way for Religion to emerge out of Darknefs; and the next Age brought about the Reformation! After this Period it is unnecessary to trace the Matter further: however I must observe to you, if at any Time since that Period, Religion hath been disgraced by the Absurdities and Phrenfies of Enthufiasm; if her Doctrines have been Mifunderftood and perverted to the worft of Purpofes, and the Decency of her outward Garb defiled and profaned; it was then when Learning alfo underwent the like cruel treatment, as is abundantly manifelt from every Period of later Hiftory.

In thefe happier Days when the Advances made in eftablifhing the Truth and Certainty of the Chriftian Dispensation, and in

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diffusing the purer Knowledge of it; in the Cultivation of a rational Philosophy and the Improvement of every polite Art and Embellishment of Life, have perhaps extended themselves as far as the Strength of the human Mind is capable of conducting its Research; happy were it for us, if this Profusion of divine and human Light were not obscur'd and affronted by the general Licentiousness of our Manners, and an eager desire in many to disbelieve against all Conviction; that Religion which alone can support the Dignity of our Nature, and add the most solid Comfort and Satisfaction to the Mind.

We have seen from this slight Review, that it seems to be the Purpose of Almighty God, and the settled Scheme of his Providence, that religious Knowledge should in some Sort keep pace with the other Improvements of the Soul; that such is the Connection between Religion & Learning that when either of them has been lost or corrupted, the
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other has not fail'd to withdraw its shining, and when one of them has in any Age arisen to great Eminence, the other has not fail'd to attain to the same Degree of Perfection. It seems indeed to be the proper Reward of the Minds exerting itself in the Acquisition of any laudable accomplishment, that Heaven should open itself to its Enquiries, or that when the Knowledge of God and his Righteousness have been first embraced and cherished by it, the inferior Attainments should be added unto them.

And yet it has been asserted that the Resurrection of Letters was a fatal Period to Christianity, now hear the noble Writer's Argument, "Many Facts piously believ'd in former Times, and upon which the Truth of Christianity has been rested very imprudently, have in more enlighten'd Ages been subverted or render'd very precarious by a strict, but just Application of the Rules of Criticism," Which is no more than to say

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what will readily be allow'd, that the Use of true critical Learning hath disperfed many of the Clouds, with which Superftition, Ignorance and Credulity, had obfcured and diffigured the Face of Religion.—This feems a fufficient Specimen of his Mode of arguing, I cannot dwell upon it.

It appears then both from Reafon and hiftoric Experience that Religion and Learning mutually fupport and are fupported by each other; it only remains to add that we of this Society, the very Inftitution of which evidently points to this Connexion, fhould labour as far as in us lies, to improve our Philofophy in Subfervience to Religion, and again to apply the falutary Moderation of pure Religion, as the Guide and Curb of thofe Sallies to which an heated Imagination is fubject in the Purfuit of Literary Knowledge; that all our Enquiries may thus tend to confirm our Faith, to ftrengthen our Virtue, and to add to both true and ferviceable Knowledge.

SERMON X.



S E R M O N X.

I. CORINTHIANS, Chap. XV. Verse 35.

But some Man will say how are the Dead raised up and with what Body do they come.

WERE we to argue from the mere Light of Natural Reason, the Difficulties, nay the utter Impossibility of giving a just and satisfactory Reply to this Question, would be readily allowed.—The Fact however is, that the Mystery of the Resurrection is a discussion not regularly amenable to the Bar of Reason, but peculiarly a Scripture Doctrine rejecting all human Theory, and explicable only, as far as it is explicable, by Scriptural Illustration. I shall make it my Business therefore on this Subject, to collate and compare the several Passages of these Holy Writings that relate

relate to the Question before us, and thus by an unobjectionable Comment, to deduce a Doctrine which I trust will prove consistent in its several Parts; and moreover satisfactory and encouraging.

The Difficulties which early embarrassed the Christian World, upon this Topic arose from the injudicious Introduction of imperfect human Philosophy, and the Sophistry of the Sceptics.—As this Species of theoretic Refinement was particularly cultivated among those to whom St. Paul addressed this Epistle; it is generally supposed that in the Words of the Text, he anticipated a very natural Question on the Part of the Epicurean Philosophers, as his Doctrine of the Resurrection was totally irreconcilable with their absurd Tenets.

How far, or in what Degree of Perfection the Revelation of this important Doctrine was committed to very early Ages, we have
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but flight Grounds to ascertain; but that a Doctrine of Resurrection was in some Measure known even before the Law, I think may be safely argued, as upon this very Ground our blessed Saviour silenced the Sadducees: for in Part of his Reply to the Question which they proposed to him as unanswerable, respecting the Case of the Woman and seven Husbands, he says as touching the dead that they rise; have ye not read in the Book of Moses (a Book which they themselves acknowledged) how in the Bush, God spake to him, I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob, yet he is not the God of the Dead, but the God of the Living, ye do therefore greatly err.—It is highly probable that every Application of this Expression before the Law, had a Reference to this Mystery; which we may without any Violence to Scripture suppose was more particularly reveal'd to the Patriarchs, in the Conferences which at that Time God so graciously vouchsafed

vouchsafed to them ; and that this Opinion was receiv'd amongst the Jews, derives Confirmation from the Epistle written to them, in which we cannot well suppose the Writer would be so injudicious as to rest an important Argument upon a Point unacknowledged.—In the 11th Chapter in recounting the Catalogue of the Faithful, which begins with Abel and comes down almost to the lowest Ages of the Jewish Church, “these all as well as Moses, had a Respect unto the Recompence of the Reward, and those to whose Lot it fell, underwent the severest Trials, not accepting Deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.”

If we wanted Testimony that the Resurrection was a Subject of common discussion, and also acknowledged by many of the Jews, we find sufficient in the Acts of the Apostles: in the 24th Chapter, in St. Paul's Defence before Felix, where he makes open Profession of the genuine Creed of their Religion
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and appeals to his Accusers themselves for this ancient Article of their Faith; we find this remarkable Passage, “ But this I confess unto thee, that after the Way which they called Heresy, so Worship I the God of my Fathers, and have a hope towards God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a Resurrection of the Dead.

Afterwards in his Defence before Agrippa and Festus, he makes another Confession of the same Faith, and proves concerning the Point in Question, that it was admitted by the Jews,” and now I stand and am judged for the *Hope of the Promise* made of God unto the Fathers, (unto which Promise he tells them the Jews themselves hope to come) and yet for this hope-fake, King Agrippa I am accused of the Jews.—What this Hope and Promise were, we learn from the Question subjoin’d; why should it be thought a Thing incredible with you, that God should raise the Dead?

What the Opinions concerning the Mode of the Resurrection amongst the Jews were, Scripture does not warrant us to pronounce; I mean not at present to enter into any Discussion of the well known Passage in Job, or to appeal to the incontrovertible Antiquity of that Book.—The Vision of the Prophet Ezekiel in the Valley of Bones, seems a still more pointed Allusion to the Doctrine in Question, and whatsoever it may be especially supposed to imply, it tends obviously to convince us, that it alluded to a general & received Belief of a Resurrection.

There was a Noise and behold a shaking, and the Bones came together, Bone to his Bone, & when I beheld, Lo! the sinews and Flesh came upon them, and the Skin covered them above, and the Breath came into them, and they liv'd and stood up upon their Feet.—I am aware that many Commentators refer all the Circumstances of this Vision to the Deliverance from the Babylonish

lonish Captivity, and not to any prophetic Annunciation of the Resurrection.—Let us even suppose it so, and I argue thus; the Prophet in foretelling this Event here adopts a typical Representation; now a typical Representation from the very Nature of the Term, implies the Idea of something habitually known.—It would be absurd to suppose him to represent a Fact under Imagery that was not familiarised to their Minds, and would in such Case be a singular Instance of want of Judgment, inadmissible in an inspired Writer: I therefore conclude from this Passage, that either the Prophet was here explaining to them the Mode of the Resurrection itself, or otherwise that he applied a receiv'd and current Opinion about it to another Purpose; so that whether the Passage relates to the Resurrection, or the Deliverance from the Captivity, it equally shews the then current Opinion of the Resurrection.—If this Argument be allow'd any Weight, we may collect from it

something of the Jewish Opinion on this Subject.—Let us now hear St. Paul after Christ had risen: In the Chapter out of which I have chosen the Text, St. Paul speaks largely and explicitly on this Subject. Of the Body he says, it is sown in Corruption, it is rais'd in Incorruption, it is sown in dishonour, it is rais'd in Glory, and again as we have borne the Image of the Earthy, we shall also bear the Image of the Heavenly, and thus concludes that Flesh and Blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.—In another Passage he is still more explicit, “who shall change our vile Body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious Body.”

Now it is somewhat singular that these Expressions of the State of the Resurrection seem not well to fall in with the Idea excited by Ezekiel's Vision, nor in Fact with the evangelical History of the New Testament: We there find that Christ rose in his indental

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tical Person of Flesh and Blood, for he eat with the Apostles the unbelieving Thomas thrust his Hand into his Side, and in every other Respect he so entirely resembled the human unalter'd Form, that we find Mary mistook him for the Gardiner, and others for a Man travelling to Jerusalem.—The Scripture itself, tho' written by different Pens, yet marked with that strict Conformity which results from Truth, may perhaps be able to reconcile in a satisfactory Manner the Contrariety of Expression and Representation, so Manifest between the Language of St. Paul, and the historical Narrative reported by the Evangelists : The Fact is, the Apostle and the Evangelists allude to different Stages of a progressive Event ; it is to be observed that our Saviour Christ for some Time did not speak explicitly to the Apostles of his Death and Resurrection, and that when he did, their Notion of it at that Time was such, that Peter says to him “*far be it from the Lord,*” for which he was
severely

severely rebuked by our Saviour: But as the Time of the full Accomplishment was approaching, our Lord found it necessary to be more explicit with them, and to reconcile it to those on whom he particularly depended for its due Promulgation, some Expedient was essentially necessary; may we not then safely hazard a Conjecture, that for this express Purpose, he shew'd them *the glorious Vision of his Transfiguration on the Mount*; that this Transfiguration was connected with his Resurrection, I gather from the Injunction laid upon them, at the Time to tell no Man the Vision *until the the Son of Man be again risen from the Dead*. Prohibitions to the Apostles from declaring what passed between him and them are not unusual.—Thus in the preceding Chapter after Peter's acknowledgment of his Master's divine Authority, they are order'd to tell no Man that he was Jesus the Christ; for this impos'd silence, there is an obvious Reason given by every Commentator; but
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in the latter Case the Injunction being laid for a specified Time, shews clearly that when that Period expired; it was equivalent to a positive Command, then to declare it.——Had the Vision been declared before, the other less informed Apostles might have been misled; they might have attained the Veracity of the Relation, when they saw the Subject of such Glory submit to Death; they might also have been misled to suppose that his Resurrection would have been in that transcendant glory which would have effectually defeated an Object which it seems our Saviour thought particularly necessary to impress upon their Minds his personal Identity after the Resurrection: We cannot pronounce with Certainty upon his Reasons; whatever they were, it appears that after the Vision, Peter who before revolted at the Idea of his Death, was now perfectly reconciled; in all probability as well from the Glory which he now was persuaded should succeed, as from the Tenor
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of the Conversation which then passed between Christ, Moses and Elias, the Subject of which St. Luke tells us was Christ's Death.—By thus connecting the Transfiguration with the Resurrection, we discover what may appear an important End of that glorious Vision, the possibility of uniting such Glory with the Identity of the Person; for we see in the three Evangelists, that the three Persons mentioned were distinctly and perfectly known, for Peter in the rapturous Extacy of the Vision cries out, it is good for us to be here! and proposes to build three Tabernacles to them, naming our Saviour, Moses and Elias.

We are told in Scripture that Christ is the first Fruits of those that Sleep.—We have therefore good Grounds for a reasonable Expectation, that our Resurrection will consequently be similar to his.—Now the scriptural Doctrine of his Resurrection, I have already endeavour'd to trace, we find that

that he suffered and was buried in the Flesh, we find also that he was raised in the Flesh, that no visible Alteration had taken place in his Appearance, for he eat with the Apostles and was mistaken by them and Mary, for an ordinary Man; such then if we believe the Scriptures must be the second State of our Bodies, or the first and momentary State of our Resurrection: Now St. Paul tells us that Flesh and Blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, but that we shall be changed in a Moment, in the twinkling of an Eye; and in another place that God will change our vile Body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious Body; of such change no Instance or Appearance had been given by our Saviour unless we consider as such the instantaneous Transfiguration on the Mount; and to this the Original seems to have a Reference not preserved in our Translation.—The Passage according to a late ingenious Divine, may run thus, “ who shall change the Body of

our Humiliation, to become of the same form of his Body of Glory," an Explanation which points out an immediate and intimate Connexion between the Resurrection and Transfiguration: And this Expression is again literally preserved by St. Peter in his second Epistle, where he expressly speaks of the Transfiguration, and applies it to the coming of our Lord, a Consideration very much in Point; hear the Passage! For we have not followed cunningly devised Fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eye Witnesses of his Majesty, for he receiv'd from the Father, Honor and Glory, when there came forth a Voice to him from the excellent Glory, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," and *this* Voice which came from heaven, *we* heard when we were with him in the holy Mount.

It

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It is generally allowed and with Reason, that the Resurrection of our blessed Saviour is the great Support of the Christian Religion; and of itself unaided by any other Testimony sufficient to establish its Credibility: it would be needless to repeat to you the many Passages in Scripture, in Proof of this, St. Paul dwells upon it with anxious Perseverance, and if we examine the various Miracles performed by Christ, we find no other of them so pointedly Circumstantial as this; it appears from the Relation that the Jews, disappointed as they were in their Expectation of a temporal Prince, yet by the Tenor of Christ's Doctrine so conformable to the Prophecies, still were in Doubt and Suspense for the Proof of the great Point of his Resurrection.—For this purpose with mark'd Attention they resolv'd to make the Sepulchre sure, sealing the Stone and setting a Watch.—The perspicuous Simplicity of the Relation in the several Evangelists of this great Event, and the

circumstantial Conformity of their Accounts in this important Fact of the History, amount to the highest Degree of Evidence, respecting the Fact; if we further consider the Circumstances of the People who have given us this Testimony, it becomes indisputable.—If the Apostles could have any worldly Design in a Fiction of his Resurrection, some might perhaps doubt their Sincerity, or if we can suppose that the Senses of all of them were deceived in his several Appearances after his Resurrection, we may doubt the Reality of the Fact. With Respect to the latter, the Senses of Thomas could not well be supposed to deceive him, when he thrust his Hand into his Side, and his Finger into the Print of the Nails; this Relation and the Doubts of the Apostles themselves are told with such an artless Simplicity, as is inconsistent with Artifice or Design, besides if any artful Design was the Object, they were very unfortunate in the Choice of a Time, for its accomplishment,
when

when Jerufalem was filled with People for the Celebration of the Paffover : But furely De-
 fign is a Term that cannot in this Place be
 applied without a ftriking Abfurdity ; we fee
 the Apoftle to whom Chrift himfelf had faid
 formerly he would found his Church on him
 as on a Rock, at the Approach of Danger, fled
 and abjured all Knowledge of him with moft
 folemn Affeverations, yet afterwards when he
 had been exprefsly told what he fhould fuf-
 fer, nay even the particular Manner of his
 Death fpecified, (as mentioned by St. John)
 this Man openly declares the Refurrection
 of Chrift.—If this Apoftle was not fincere,
 I know not where to look for that Virtue.
 The Credibility of this Faét then refts upon
 the Testimony of Men, whose perfonal In-
 terests and every powerful Principle of hu-
 man Nature muft prompt them to have con-
 cealed it, yet thefe Men we fee were fo per-
 fuaded of the Faét, and the certainty of its
 Confequences ; that the Love of Life itfelf
 gave way : and can we doubt or refift the Force
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of such Evidence, or why should it appear a Thing incredible to us that God should raise the Dead; the great Being that created us can by the same Power collect the moulder'd Atoms into the same Form, and endue it with the Body of his Glory: That the Jews in general from their national Prejudice, respecting the Character in which their Messiah should come, did not believe, (probably from not examining the Circumstances of his Resurrection) is certain; not that they conceived such a Fact to be impossible; they had Testimony of something similar in their own Books of undisputed Authority, in the Circumstances of the Miracles wrought by Elijah and Elifha, too well known to require Repetition now.— But in the present Instance a rooted Prejudice and national Pride operated against Conviction, and *their* ill conceived Idea of a Deliverer, was irreconcilable with the Appearance of one suffering on the Cross; in Consequence of this Misapprehension, the

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the generality of them enquired *no farther about the Matter*, and the Circumstance of his Resurrection became a Subject of serious Concern to *those* only of more Information. Accordingly we find that the Application to Pilate to secure the Sepulchre was made by the *chief Priests and Pharisees*, as the former were particularly interested to preserve the Jewish Law, its Poms, Ceremonies and Advantages to themselves, which would have been effectually abolished by the Simplicity of the Christian Doctrine.—The latter perhaps unwilling to give up that never failing Source of public Applause, their rigid Observance of Rites and Ceremonies, which would have been rendered ineffectual & ridiculous, had the Religion of Christ been established by his Resurrection.—The most enlighten'd of the heathen Philosophers, acknowledged the immortality of the Soul, but as to the State of it after Death, their Surmises were wild and various, add to their several Fancies on this Head the Absurdity
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of the doctrine of the Transmigration, introduced by one of their most admired Sages, and then yourselves judge of the striking Necessity for a determinate Revelation on this head. This explicit and valuable Revelation, we my Christian Brethren are happily in Possession of, let us then reflect upon our distinguished Privilege with Gratitude, let that Body of Glory to which the good and virtuous shall be transfigured, be always in our Thoughts, let it direct us in our Actions here, and render us meet Subjects for that Kingdom, where dwells inconceivable Glory, and where Death is swallowed up in Victory, thro' the Sufferings, Death, and Resurrection of our blessed Redeemer.



S E R M O N XI.

II. PETER, Chap. III. Verse 3.

*Knowing this First, that there shall come
in the last Days, Scoffers.*

IT would be a great Point gained in the Cause of Truth, if we could once persuade Men to reason calmly and dispassionately about it; if they could be brought to debate on Things serious in a serious Manner, and to regulate all their Enquiries in Matters of an allowed Importance, by the Rules of Decency and Sobriety.—No Man that is a real Friend to Religion, can be willing to oppose a rational Examination into the Truth of any opinions or Doctrines that come recommended to us by the Authority of so venerable a Name, not only because this would be an impregnable Security

curity to Error where it had ever taken Possession, but because the Interest of *Truth* itself must be injured by it, *which* may give Room for Suspicion when it declines a Scrutiny, but will retain all its Weight and Purity in Trial, and shine even with a greater Lustre for the severity of it.—Every Man who professes himself to be a free Enquirer in religious Concerns, should bring with him a Mind duly disciplined to make his Enquiries successful.

Having laid in a proper Store of previous Knowledge to inform his Understanding, he must be satisfied of the vast Importance of the Matters he is about to take into Consideration, he must approach them with Modesty and Reverence, examine them with Meekness and Sincerity, and Judge of them with Candor and Impartiality.—Those who are *already* settled in true religious Principles would not long be at Variance with such a Disposition as this: But it is *one*
Thing

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Thing to *convince* Men who delight in Instruction; and *another* to *prepare* Men to be capable of Conviction.—*This* is a Task of Labor and Difficulty indeed, for whilst a Levity of Mind, an Affectation of *Novelty*, an *undistinguishing* Aversion to Superstition, the self-sufficiency of Ignorance, or superficial Enquiry; the Prevalence of Fashion or Contagion of evil Acquaintance, and above all strong Prejudices in Favor of vicious Habits; determine Men severally, against the Doctrines and Duties of an holy Religion; how shall we go about to explain the one or enforce the other? In vain do we oppose to such Unbelievers the Strength of Reason and Argument, when they lose all their Force, merely because they are advocates for *Religion*, whilst from the same Principles, every little plausible Plea that can be urged in Favor of Infidelity, is embraced as Demonstration: And to aggravate the Misfortune; these are a Generation so Wise in their own Conceit, that as they will

not give ear to Admonition, so neither can they be prevailed upon to be silent; obstinate in Error themselves, their Satisfaction is incompleat without labouring for Profelytes.—It is however our Duty, whatever be the Success, to persevere in recommending the Interests of Religion, and it behoves us especially, since we rest the Success of our Cause upon the Truth of it, that we neither *defend* it ourselves in such a Manner as to *weaken* it, nor suffer our Adversaries to overthrow it by Subtilty & Stratagem: And, that as we may be sure they can be furnished with no Arguments against us from right Reason; so we suffer them not without Detection, to substitute fallacies in their Room.

It falls not within my present Design to enumerate or distinguish by their several Kinds, all the Arts of false Reasoning, by which Infidels pervert the Judgment of Mankind; seduce the illiterate and unwary, and even sometimes perplex the Diligent
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and more learned Enquirer: But my present Subject confines me to the Consideration of a particular Artifice, which though little connected with Reason, and rarely with the Appearance of it, has perhaps done more Mischief in general to the Interests of Religion, than any other Mode of Attack; I mean the seducing Application of the Arts of Mockery, and the Shafts of Ridicule.— In the pursuit of this Subject it would be my indispensable Duty to examine the insidious Arguments of a late popular and celebrated Writer, but that it has already been so amply accomplished by an appropriate and able Tract: I shall therefore at present confine myself to the following Subjects; to shew that an Inclination to Ridicule is apt to lead Men off from any serious Enquiries at all; that it cannot in itself avail to the Discovery or the Trial of Truths; and that the Application of it, even in Defence of Religion, is neither a proper or effectual Method to promote its Interests.—

I shall further observe how those who pretend most to this Talent of Ridicule do in *Reality* employ it, and shall briefly recommend the Means of securing our Religion against all Attacks from this Quarter.

If, as I have just observed a Fondness for Ridicule is apt to lead Men from any serious Enquiries at all, it ought to follow, that we should be cautious how we indulge ourselves in a Propensity to it; because allowing that it might be of Service if properly applied, yet in all likelihood we never shall make that right Application: And that the foregoing Observation is just, Experience will teach us, and Reason may Account for what Experience teaches us to be true.

For whatever Qualities may be necessary to furnish Men with a Talent for Ridicule, yet we shall almost universally find a Levity of Mind to be the Main-Spring that sets it
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in Action, and accordingly, the Passion is indulged at the Expence of Friends, Religion and every the most solemn Occasion.

Nor indeed is it to be presumed that Men bigotted to this kind of Wit will ever lose an Opportunity of exerting it; or be restrained by Propriety and Decency, when Sprightliness and Humour alone is their Aim.—They can no more be inclined to, than they are qualified for serious Enquiry, for how should they perplex themselves with Examination of Principles, and tedious Deduction of Consequences, to settle, what they are very unanctious to have settled at all, their own Thoughts.

That Men of this turn should have made some superficial Enquiries into religious Matters, and that by a slight Application they should have furnished themselves with a kind of Skill, actually worse than Ignorance; I mean that of raising Doubts and
Difficulties,

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Difficulties, without knowing or caring for a Solution, is as readily to be accounted for as admitted; as this is their lasting Fund for Ridicule, without which some Opportunities of displaying their Talent would be lost: Now the more Solemn the Subject, the more the Ridicule is heighten'd; as Persons are the more exposed by an antick Representation, in Proportion to the Gravity of their Characters.—Thus will a Fondness for Ridicule in all probability prevent Men from entering at all into any Enquiries relative to Religion, any further than as they furnish Materials for the Exercise of Wit; but even allowing Men of this fantastical turn to enter seriously into religious Enquiry, it remains to shew that Ridicule is neither a good Assistant in the pursuit, nor a just Criterion of Truth.—It is the Judgment, the discriminating Faculty of the Mind which is chiefly engaged about Truth. The end of Ridicule is to amuse by striking out whimsical and unexpected Similitudes; therefore

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therefore in serious Matters of Religion, where the Subject affords but little Fund for this Talent, where the Truths are obvious and distinct, they must necessarily be disguised and misrepresented before they can become its proper Object, and Truth must be made so to resemble Error, that it will be difficult to distinguish and delineate its original Features; nor can we with any Justice call that a proper Assistance in the Discovery of Truth, which actually draws over it a Mask to disguise it.—Neither is Ridicule a better Criterion for the Trial of Truth, than an Assistant in the pursuit of it, it is by no Means proving it to be so, by asserting that Truth is to be tried by Ridicule, because it can never prevail against Truth; for upon this principle, Persecution or any other the most injurious Treatment of Religion may be recommended for the Trial.

And altho' we know that Truth far prevail, as to be incapable of being false by any Artifice, yet may it not by ridiculed, appear to be so, and lose of its Effects; and may not a hasty censure be made to its Prejudice, the Ridicule is discerned to be false; it always easily and quickly discovers whether Ridicule be pointed at its Object; here the cool Deliberation and Understanding alone can operate, and the supposed Standard of Trial must itself submit to another superior Criterion, our Reason, which is capable of answering its Purpose much better without it.

But the most specious Plea in Behalf of this Practice remains, and which carries more Weight, because it has formerly been espoused by indisputable Friends of the Cause of Virtue and Religion.—It has been urged that the Ridicule is in itself too good to be proposed as a Guide to conduct.

XI.

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the Knowledge of religious Truths, yet when they are established on their own Foundation, and have approved themselves to our Judgment, that then it may be of considerable Service both in Defence and Recommendation of them; that it may be prevalent to silence unreasonable Opposition; to keep true Piety in Countenance, and to make irreligion ashamed. I should be sorry to deprive Religion of any Aid that can contribute to the Security of it, but I am unwilling to call in any Auxiliaries whose Services are questionable; and therefore must observe that Ridicule is no wise serviceable to promote the Interests of Religion.—As to Gain-Sayers it is in vain to think of silencing them by Retaliation of Raillery, who *then* only expect Success, when the Trial is put upon a wrong Issue, it can never be done but by serious Argumentation proposed in the Spirit of Meekness and Charity.—The former of these will secure our own Cause; and the latter

will contribute much to win over our Adversaries.—Whilst we rely upon strict Reasoning only we secure a Foundation; and a soft Answer is a Recommendation to others of the Reasoning it contains: Whereas there is an Acrimony in Ridicule, that will exasperate rather than reclaim, and render Men incapable of receiving the Truth, by Prejudicing them against it, from the very Channel of Conveyance; nor are we ourselves free from all Dangers of Delusions from setting up false Lights, which may give our Adversaries an Advantage over us, by leading us also out of the Way; neither is Ridicule to be trusted as proper to promote the practice of Religion and Virtue by endeavouring to put Vice and Immorality out of Countenance; they are not of so modest a Nature, and if Arguments of a more sublime Kind, drawn from nobler Motives have no Efficacy, they are not to be vanquished by being laugh'd at.—The Obligation we are under to conform to the
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Will of God, which is the Foundation of Duty; the essential and eternal Differences of Things which constitute Virtue and Vice; the Conformity of the one and the Disagreement of the other to our Nature; and the Improvement or Debasement of it consequent upon our different Choice of acting; are the true Motives to influence and determine a rational Creature.—The Love of God to Mankind, and his Abhorrence of Wickedness, exhibited in the Mystery of our Redemption; the Precepts, the Examples, the Sufferings of our blessed Lord, the Life and Immortality he has revealed, the gracious Promises of the Gospel to allure Men to Goodness, and the dreadful Judgments denounced against the obstinately Profane; are still more forcible motives to persuade and animate a *Christian*. If Mens' Minds are steel'd against receiving any Impression from such Topics as these, it is a Kind of Presumption to expect it from Ridicule, which besides we are not authorised

rised to make Use of either from Revelation or Reason.—It was not the Practice of Christ and his Apostles to make a jest of Mens' Vices, but they discountenanced all such Behaviour as much as might be, both by their Doctrine and their Examples.—Even Solomon who so much insists upon the Folly of Wickedness, does not treat it ludicrously, but speaks of it as a Folly more apt to move Melancholy than Mirth, even as the Folly of Foolishness and Madness; and Reason itself may likewise inform us, that nothing is so likely to lessen the natural Veneration and Awe in Men, with which the Consideration of religious Matters is attended, and upon which in a great Measure depends the Effect they are likely to produce in the Mind, as a light and ludicrous Treatment of them.—Men will be apt to think that Things cannot be of any weighty Consequence, which even they who recommend them, make so free with themselves;

felves; and that neither Danger nor Death is at Hand, where they who denounce them are themselves in Sport.

To say that Ridicule is of no *real* Use, would appear a harsh Assertion to those who conceive themselves possessed of a Talent for it.—So long as it is left in full Possession of every Folly, of every Absurdity, and Extravagance in Life, in short of all Things that are Blemishes in human Conduct, rather than Vices; the Advocates for it will have no Reason to complain that it will ever want Employment.

If from the foregoing Consideration it shall appear that Ridicule is not proper to be allowed in the Defence of Religion; how strong must be the Conclusion that it never should be employed to the Destruction of it: If it stands in Need of Excuse even in a good Man, and in a good Cause; how utterly unpardonable must it be, when used
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by bad Men to bad Purposes? For it is not to be expected that the pleasantry of Wick- edness should take away the malignity of it, or that Wit should atone for Sin; and yet as there is a daring Tribe of Men, who declare open War with it against every Thing which is Sacred, I shall now proceed to observe as I proposed, how those who pretend most to this talent generally employ it.

The first Sort that fall under our Notice are those who attack Religion in general, who have no just Notions of God and his Attributes, deny or disregard his Providence, confound all Distinctions of moral Good and Evil, and have no Sense of the Dignity of human Nature.—It is Matter to them of endless Derision that we, who in their Expression are but a better Kind of Brutes, should pay such Homage to Virtue, as to renounce the Pleasures of the World, and often subject ourselves to present Cares and Inconveniences for the Sake of it, when
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all that we can propose to ourselves is a precarious Expectancy in Reversion, much more when this idol Virtue, which we fall down before is nothing but a Phantom, the Creature of our own Imaginations, or at best depends upon Custom, and the arbitrary Constitution of human Laws.—Accordingly there is not a single moral Virtue which they would not banter out of the World, by giving it some reproachful Name.—If we shew Zeal for the Honor of God, they mock our Enthufiasm; if we worship and fear him, our Superstition; whatever generous Things have been done for the Welfare of Mankind, will meet with no better a Name than those of Folly, Vanity or Design; all private Goodness will be exposed by them as Grimace, Hypocrify, and Preciseness.—But I would almost venture to demand of these very Men, what there is ridiculous in the Belief of a supreme, infinite, intelligent Mind, the Creator and Governor of the Universe! whether it be not

most absurd to suppose the contrary, if we but reflect on the Vastness, Regularity and Exactness, of the beautiful System of Nature? and may not the surprising Harmony continually preserved in all the Parts of it, very reasonably persuade us, that the great Author of it still supports it by his Providence, keeping it uniformly in Subjection to the Laws he at first prescribed? What is there ludicrous in supposing also this being to be just and holy and good, and therefore the same preserver of Order in the moral World, that he is in the natural? That for this Reason he created Man with an excellent Understanding to discern Good from Evil, and with freedom of will to make him capable of Rewards and Punishments. Can it excite the Laughter of any but of Fools, when we place the Excellence of Man's Nature in his rational Faculties, and the Justness of his Conduct in the Regulation of it by Reason: What Folly is there in submitting ourselves to that which was given us
for

for our Guide and Instructor, or how can we find any Thing ridiculous in those Actions which our governing Principle not only approves of but commands.—How great then is the Folly and Impiety of those, who thus wantonly shoot their Arrows against Heaven, who scatter Fire-Brands and Death amongst Men, and say “ Are we not in Sport.” But there is another Class perhaps more numerous and certainly more dangerous, who would be thought to be convinced of the Obligation, and to allow the Duties of natural Religion; but are declared Enemies to Revelation, and ridicule the Belief of it upon every Occasion with all the Malice of Wit.—Christianity pleads a Prescription of near 2000 Years, and is at this Time the established Religion of our Country; it ought at least by those who suspect the Grounds of it, to be examined with Candor and to be proceeded against with Discretion and Gentleness; for there is a decent Regard due to the Religion of a

Country, even tho' it should prove an erroneous one; to laugh at the Public upon any Account is to be wanting in that Respect which is due to the common Regulations of Society; much greater is the Influence when *private* Men venture to deride those Things, which are the Object of *public* Veneration.

Whoever therefore instead of refuting Errors by Reason and Temper, will treat in a contemptuous Manner what carries with it to others a sacred Character; can only give Scandal where he should endeavour at a Reformation; and must shew himself to be equally a Stranger to good Sense and to good Manners.

But if we look into the Christian Scheme, does there seem to be any Thing ridiculous in supposing what cannot well be denied, that all Mankind had transgressed the original Law of God, whether it was natural only,

only, or also revealed, and that they had consequently involved themselves in the Guilt of Sin; that God is a Being infinite in Justice as well as Mercy, and that according to our Conceptions it is as much the Property of the one, before a Reconciliation with Offenders, to insist upon some Atonement; as it is a token of the other, graciously to accept it; that accordingly he sent his Son into the World to take human Nature upon him, and in that to be a Sacrifice and Propitiation for the Sins of the whole World: That by an extraordinary Revelation, at a Time when Ignorance and Vice had overspread the World, he taught Mankind their Duty in a more explicit and perfect Manner than it had ever been known before; that he supported his Laws with the properest Sanctions, and promised us such Assistance for the fulfilling of them, concurrent with our own Endeavours; as the meer natural Man must want, both as an Encouragement and as a Support.—This is but an imperfect

imperfect Sketch of the Christian Scheme; but enough to discover that there is much in it to excite our Adoration of the divine Goodness, but nothing to create our Mirth.

It remains only that I should briefly recommend the best Means of securing our Religion against such Attacks.—The chief Thing requisite is a thorough Knowledge of the Grounds and Principles of our Religion: When we know the Reason of the Hope that is in us, it then becomes an Anchor of the Soul both sure and steadfast, which will hinder us from fluctuating amidst a Diversity of unsettled Opinions, and will keep us firm and immoveable against the Shocks of Infidelity.—Conviction arising from an insight into Truth will inspirit us in every Conflict, and will be a Defence against the Craft of Sophistry and the Stings of Ridicule. Secure in the Strength of a rational Belief, the Enemy can have no Advantage; but if we profess to teach a Religion which

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we have only taken upon Trust; as our Notions concerning it will be erroneous, so our Instructions will misrepresent it, and our Defence betray it: An injurious Exposition; or an injudicious Vindication, will ruin the best of Causes, and lay the Author of them open to certain Mockery and Contempt.—How careful therefore should we be to furnish ourselves by proper Application with all necessary and useful Knowledge for the Service of Religion, lest peradventure we be found to fight against God, even out of a Zeal for his Honour.

SERMON XII.



S E R M O N XII.

HEBREWS, Chap. II. Verse 17.

*Wherefore in all Things it behoved him
to be made like unto his Brethren.*

IT appears from many Passages in Scripture, that the great Objection made by the Jews to the Divinity of Christ, arose from their being unable to comprehend the Possibility of uniting the divine and human Natures; accordingly we find that when our Saviour told them that he was the Son of God, and that he and the Father were one, they took up Stones to stone him.—And as this Difficulty prevented many of them from embracing Christianity at all, so it appears from particular Passages and from the whole Tenor of this Epistle, that the same Reasons

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sons were tending to introduce Apostacy amongst those who had.—The Apostle proceeds in it with great Clearness of Method, to shew them in the first Place the difference between our Saviour and all other Beings of which they had any Idea under a divine Mission.—He begins the Epistle by saying, God who at fundry Times, and in divers Manners spake in Time past unto the Fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last Days spoken unto us by his Son.—He proceeds to shew the Charge, the Majesty, and the Divinity of Christ, his eternal presence at the right Hand of the Father, and his Superiority to the Angels; and on this Part of the Subject, the following Remark may not perhaps be thought superfluous: In the 7th Verse of this Chapter, the Quotation of the Apostle from the Psalms runs thus, in the vulgar Translation; thou madest him a little lower than the Angels, which Expression in our Language is not justified by the Original, the Greek Words beyond Con-

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troverſy, ſignify a ſhort Space of Time, which very Words occur again in the 9th Verſe, by which is clearly meant that he was for a ſhort Time rendered inferior to the Angels, as participating of our Nature: And it will appear that I have not in this Conſtruction wretched the Greek Words, from the Senſe in which the Evangelifts and Apoſtles uſed them; for let us look to the Acts of the Apoſtles 5th Chapter and 34th Verſe, where the ſame Greek Expreſſion precisely occurs, and in the Senſe I have expreſſed; they are there tranſlated for a ſhort Space, meaning a ſhort Space of Time, the Paſſage is as follows, “ Then ſtood there up one in the Council, a Pharifee named Gamaliel, a Doctor of Law, had in Reputation among all the People, and commanded to put the Apoſtles forth *a little Space*.”—Again in St. Luke after a little while another ſaw him and ſaid, “ Thou alſo art of them, and Peter ſaid I am not.” In this Paſſage the Words are nearly the ſame, and the precise Word carries

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carries the same Signification as before.—I have been led into this Digression to rescue this Passage from Misinterpretation, but I now return to the Subject.—The Apostle in Pursuit of his Train of Reasoning begins the second Chapter thus; “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest Heed to the Things which we have heard, lest at any Time we should let them slip.” Thus shewing the superior Degree of Attention to be paid to the Doctrine of Christ.—He then proceeds to the Humiliation and the Excellence of Christ, and here his Expressions are in many Places taken from the Psalms and with particular Judgment from the 22d, which Psalm appears to be rather historical than prophetic of our Saviour’s Appearance and Sufferings; the Quotations from which to the Hebrews might perhaps have been of singular Weight, as this Psalm is by many judicious Men supposed to have been daily sung in their religious Ceremonies at Day break.—The Apostle then shews from

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Passages

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Passages in the Old Testament, that he participated of the Nature and Affections of Man, and thence judiciously points out the peculiar Advantages derived to us from this particular Mode of Salvation, the Incarnation of the Son of God.—Altho' this Epistle was designed for the Confirmation of the Jews, then in Danger of Apostacy; yet were there any, (which I trust there are not of those who hear me) who strain at Difficulties in the Doctrine; what Model of Argument can be suggested Superior to that of the Apostle, who methodically proves, first the Possibility, then the Advantages of the Incarnation, and lastly the Fact from the Jewish Prophecies?—On the first Head the Apostle does not extend, the Jews acknowledged the infinite Power of God, his Omnipotence to effectuate any Mode that seems best to his Wisdom, is sufficient to check the Rashness of those who dare to challenge the Doctrine upon a Presumption that the infinite Wisdom of God could have devised
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many other Modes of Salvation for us, more agreeable to *his* Majesty, and more reconcileable to *our* Reason.—Nay, but O Man who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the Person saved, say unto him that saved him, why hast thou saved me *thus*?—We do not argue thus in daily Occurrences; the drowning Man who when just rescued from Death, should quarrel with his Deliverer for saving him by any one Limb in preference to another which he might have thought more Expedient, would justly meet the Scorn and Ridicule of Mankind and the Rebuke of his Deliverer.

But there are some who leave to God his Choice of the Means, provided such Means are reconcileable to human Reason, and object to the Mystery of the Incarnation upon the Impossibility of conceiving the Union of the divine and human Natures; yet such Men seldom deny the Existence of their own Souls and Bodies, an Union as
inexplicable

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inexplicable to Reason as the Doctrine about which they cavil.—But even tho' nothing could be here discovered from which we could argue by Analogy, are we to restrain the Omnipotence of God within the narrow Precincts of Reason? can we argue from this Standard alone about Creation, can we argue about Annihilation, infinite Space and endless Time? it leads us to acknowledge the Possibility of the former and the Existence of the latter, but in any farther Research our Clue is lost.

If a Man will reject the Doctrine of Salvation because God has not thought proper to reveal to him a Mystery for which perhaps his Faculties are not suited; I should expect from the same Man, a Determination to take no Rest because he does not comprehend the Nature of Sleep, and to discontinue Respiration because that Physiologists have not been able to demonstrate to him its mechanical Cause, and Mode of Operation
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on the Animal Œconomy.—Leaving then the Possibility of the Incarnation, to the unlimited Power of God, let us as becomes his Creatures, endeavour to trace his Wisdom in that Part of the Blessing which lies within our reach, and let us exert our Attention and direct our Enquiries to the peculiar Advantages, that even by us can be discovered to flow from Christ being made like unto his Brethren.—Let us then consider the Design of our Saviour's Mission, that he came into the World to save Sinners by turning us away, every one of us from our Iniquities, and thereby purifying to himself a People zealous of good Works; and we shall find that the Manifestation of Christ in the Flesh did more powerfully and more effectually Answer this End, than any other Means could.

The first Advantage that occurs, is the Simplicity of the Character which the Deity assumed from whom the Precepts of eternal

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nal Life might issue with all the Sanction of the Godhead, without the Terror of its Majesty: We find when God spake to the Jews in the Fullness of his Glory, that it was too terrible and full of Majesty to be supported by Mortals; and we find that they who heard that Voice, entreated that the Word should not be spoken to them any more, for they could not endure that which was commanded; nay so terrible was the Sight, that Moses himself said, I exceedingly fear and quake, and this very Argument the Apostle makes use of in the 12th Chapter of this Epistle, to shew to the Jews the necessity of the Incarnation of the Son of God, and how agreeable it was to his Goodness, to converse with Men in this Familiar, this humble Manner.—But mark another Advantage from the Incarnation; if Christ had not come in the Flesh and taken our Nature upon him, the glorious and powerful Example of Holiness and Perfection which he set before us, and which it was absolutely
necessary

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necessary should be set before us, would have been lost to us.—And tho' the Arguments of his Doctrine are conclusive and convincing in the highest Degree, even were their divine Origin not announced; altho' their amiable Rectitude engage us in Speculation, still in as much as Example is more powerful than Precepts, in so much is the Incarnation of Christ even to our Understandings demonstrably superior to any other Method which we ourselves could devise: for were this Example given by one of a different Nature from ourselves, it might no longer be esteemed an Example for Men, but for Angels, and Beings of a superior Order.—Such an Example the incarnate Son of God alone could exhibit, no created Being under the Infirmities of our Spiritual, and Temptations of our corporeal Nature could do it; and this Consideration at once removes all Objections made to the lowly and inconspicuous Character which he assumed, for he came not to instruct us in the

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Wisdom of this World, the amassing of Riches and the Acquisition of Honors; in this Mankind were well enough instructed before, besides it carries Absurdity on the Face, to suppose the Son of God sent into the World to enjoy the Pleasures, Honors, and Profits of it; these are too far beneath the Majesty of Heaven, and inconsistent with the essential Bliss of the divine Nature: But to manifest himself to shew the mean and worthless Character of those Things which Mankind pursue with so great Avidity, to hold forth the persuasive Example of Contentment in a low Condition, of Patience and Meekness under the severest Afflictions; to discover to Men the unbeaten Road to Happiness in the worst Circumstances of this Life, this was a glorious and a God-like Design, such as none but the Son of God *could* perform, such as we may with Reason believe he *would* undertake, and for which he might vouchsafe without any Contradiction to his divine Nature, to live a human

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man Life on Earth, and that too in an humble Sphere ; for had he come in a superior human Character, altho' he had exhibited in his Person as he necessarily must have done a spotless Pattern of Holiness and Uprightness, yet might not the Effects of his Doctrines on others be attributed more to Authority than Persuasion, and thus after his Return to the Father the Effect might have ceased.—But in him we find no Exertion but Argument, Persuasion and Example ; no temporal Rewards, but the direct contrary ; a Certainty of Persecution.

It is impossible on this Subject to apply any Mode of Reasoning which the Apostle has left untouched, and the best Illustration of the Doctrine, and would be a perpetual Commentary upon the Epistle ; but as that cannot be complied with here, I shall take from his Words the Grounds of another Argument.—He says we have not an high Priest who cannot be touched with the Feel-

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ing of our Infirmities, but he was in all Points tempted like as we are, yet without Sin, let us therefore come boldly unto the Throne of Grace, that is let us come forward with Assurance that we have an Intercessor before the Father who has taken our Nature into an Union with his own, which he continually presents before the Father; the Infirmities and Temptations of which he himself experienced though with Power to subdue.—And here another Argument arises, as the end of Christ's coming was to turn us to the Lord, and as no Obedience to his Laws can be truly acceptable, but that which springs from Love, so no Scheme could possibly engage so strongly our Gratitude as that which so manifestly declared his abundant Love to us, in sending his Son to take our Nature upon him. Had it been possible for a Creature to undertake and effect our Redemption, there could be no Bounds to our Esteem, no Language could furnish Expressions of our
Gratitude

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Gratitude for the Blessing, nor could we shew our Sense of it, unless by Idolatry, by deifying, worshipping and paying to him, Honors due only to the Divinity: May not this perhaps be another Argument why this Mode of Redemption was made Choice of by the omniscient God, who knows the workings of our Hearts; to remove the Temptation to the heinous Sin of Idolatry from before us; we find that to prevent this in the Case of Moses, who was but a temporal Deliverer, and only the Type of Christ, the provident and indulgent God concealed his Sepulchre from the Israelites, because he knew they would worship and adore him in it; and may not this Mode of arguing be extended, and may we not account for the Frequency of Idolatry in the Heathen World, from the prevailing Influence, and Force of Gratitude.

I have now produced some of the Arguments which to *us* appear reasonably convincing

vincing why this Mode should be adopted by the beneficent God for the Redemption of Mankind, and if we thro' a Veil dimly discover so many, is it not reasonable to suppose that there may be infinitely more and better ones known only to the Deity: Is it not our Duty to trace his Wisdom, where we can discover it, and to admire, where we see its Effects, tho' lost in the Search of secondary Causes.

The last Point which in Pursuit of the Apostles Scheme of Argument, I could wish to recommend to your Attention is the actual Proof of the Incarnation of our blessed Saviour from the fulfilling of the Prophecies in his Person: On this the Jews themselves depended for Proof of the Messiah; but being misled by a false Expectation of a temporal Deliverer, they misinterpreted each Prophecy, nor could they believe tho' in exact Conformity to one of them, that their Deliverer should come in
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an humble Character, Meek and fitting upon an Ass and a Colt, the Foal of an Ass. Yet if we candidly examine the Prophecies and compare them with his miraculous Birth, and every Passage of his Life, they agree even in such minute Particulars that the Shadow of a Doubt cannot remain. We find that he himself in some Measure rested the Proof of his Mission on the fulfilling of the Prophecies in his Person, for when John had sent two of his Disciples to him to ask, art thou he that should come, or look we for another? Jesus said, go your Way and tell John what Things you have seen and heard, how that the Blind see, the Lame walk, the Lepers are cleansed, the Deaf hear, the Dead are raised, to the Poor the Gospel is preached; and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.

It may be remarked that this Reply consists of the following Particulars, 1st, an Account of Miracles performed, and these
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marked by a very particular Kind of Selection out of many ; 2d, the Circumstance of the Poor having the Gospel preached to them ; and 3d, an Intimation of Offence that had been and should be taken at him. An attentive Consideration of these Particulars may lead us to the true Spirit of the Reply, the solid Confirmation of his divine Authority.—Miracles are undoubtedly a Proof of supernatural Assistance, but Miracles had been performed by many of their own Nation, and therefore not of themselves sufficient to prove that *he* it was that should come, and that they should not look for another, and it seems probable that if our Saviour rested his Authority on these alone he might have been contented to have sent the first and general Reply, go and tell John what Things you have seen and heard, without that striking Selection of particular Miracles.—But if we turn to Isaiah, there we shall find the Reason of his being thus particular, we find it there written, “ Then
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the Eyes of the Blind shall be opened, and the Ears of the Deaf shall be unstopped, then shall the lame Man leap as an Hart, and the Tongue of the dumb sing; and hence we may collect that the Force of the Reply was chiefly directed to the fulfilling of the Prophecies in his Person; and this is still more strongly confirmed by the Remainder of it, viz. The Poor have the Gospel preached unto them.—This was certainly no Miracle, and tho' it was confessedly unusual amongst the Jews, yet of itself it was no Argument of divine Mission; but it becomes a forcible one if we look into Isaiah and there read, “ The Spirit of God is upon me, for he hath anointed me to preach good Tidings unto the Meek.”

As to the third part of the Reply, “ Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me;” John must have been persuaded that such Offence would come, for John was himself at that Time in Prison! but the Harmony is

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complete, and the whole Argument collected, when we read in Isaiah, "He shall be for a Stone of Stumbling and for a Rock of Offence to both the Houses of Israel," and again, "He is despised and rejected of Men, a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with Grief, and we hid as it were our Faces from him, he was despised and we esteemed him not." It is not my Design, nor indeed would it be possible for me to compare all the Prophecies with the Passages of his Life, I was led so far by the striking circumstances of his own Reply.—I can however recommend it to the Attention of those who hear me, to examine them from a Conviction that the greater Attention they bestow upon the Subject, the greater Satisfaction they will receive; the more minute Circumstances of his Life conspiring with the grand Tenor of his Mission to form an Harmony that affords no common Share of Delight.

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I make no Doubt but that all who hear me are within themselves convinced that had our Saviour appeared in their Time, they would not have rejected his Salvation, that it should not be said of them that they received him not; but as *we* are *not* the People immediately blessed with his divine Presence, how are we to shew our Conviction of his Truth, but by the most steady Adherence to his Precepts, proving by the Conformity of our Lives to them that we are persuaded of their Rectitude and conscious of their divine Authority; convinced from his glorious Example in the Flesh, that they are not beyond hopes of Imitation; and relying firmly on his Aid in our Struggles, and Intercession for our Failures? Under such well grounded Persuasions, thro' Faith and Hope, and perfect Reliance on him, no Evil of Life, no Trial of our Faith and Virtue will be burdensome, but with animated Joy, we shall tho' at a Distance see a

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Certainty of those Promises which will assuredly be made good to all that trust in the infinite Merits and ceaseless Mediation of our blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.







